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MURIEL:

OR,

SOCIAL FETTERS.

A Novel.

BY MRS. EDWIN JAMES,

AUTHOR OF "WANDERINGS OF A BEAUTY."

GUIL. Prison, my lord?
ROS. Then is the world one.
HAM. A goodly one in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons.
ROS. We think not so, my lord.
HAM. Why then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so: to me it is a prison.

SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
CHARLES J. SKEET, 10, KING WILLIAM STREET,
CHARING CROSS.
1867.

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MURIEL:

OR,

SOCIAL FETTERS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE VILLA AT TWICKENHAM.

THE banks of England's noblest river, the lordly Thames, are, as all the world knows, studded here and there with charming villas, whose flowery and smoothly shaven lawns slope downward to the verge of the fresh and health-giving stream, into whose sparkling waters the drooping willow and feathery acacia love to dip their pendant branches. Sweet sequestered homes! to us ye have ever possessed a fascination peculiarly your own: oft as floating down the river on some balmy summer's eve, has the passing glimpse of some lovely saunterer, or may be the shimmer of a robe of snowy muslin, awakened in

our heart a world of mystery and romance; or may-be, the silvery sound of a harp, or the echo of some fresh young voice, has set us castle building like any knight-errant of old. An easy distance from the city, yet entirely secluded, the man of business, the scholar, the author may in these sylvan bowers each find a retreat suited alike to their several tastes. And if the woman of sentiment and refinement loves to linger beneath the shade of the stately beeches, no less may the fair and frivolous votary of pleasure or fashion bid her aristocratic guests to a *déjeûner* or a *thé dansante* on the velvet sward, when, according to the *Morning Pos* "by the kind permission of Col. the Hon. Percy Noble, the band of the * * * Regt. of Hussars performed a variety of choice *morceaux* to the evident satisfaction of the distinguished guests there assembled."

And now, friendly reader, by your permission, we will invite you to accompany us to one of the most picturesque and fairy-like of these arcadias, in order to be introduced to its inmates. Ah! there they are, the younger portion of the family at least, upon the lawn. A girl of that age which can scarcely be termed childhood, yet which, without actually

trespassing on the bounds of womanhood, still approaches so near as to appropriate much of its charm and fascination, and a boy, possibly her senior by a couple of years. She is seated on a garden chair, her lap full of flowers, tastefully arranging them into a garland which you immediately imagine an appropriate crown of fragrance for the nut-brown curls, which are now falling in slight disorder around the sweet rosy face; the young girl is bending assiduously over her work, the boy has flung himself at full length on the grass at her feet. We must not forget the third party present, for he too is loving, good, and true, as the youthful pair, into either of whose fair and happy face he turns an upward, wistful gaze. Nor do they fail to pat the noble head of their four-footed friend, and say, frequently, "Poor Nel," "Good old fellow," and such like dog talk. For they are of that blissful age when life is young and love is tender and true—and books, and nature, and birds, and all things fresh and fair, are to them innocent and soul-felt sources of delicious feeling.

"Ah!" exclaimed the boy, "how glad I am that we have at last left, hot, dusty London; it was a capital move, that of the doctor! what say you, fair Muriel?"

"Of course—yes," replied the girl; "you know how I love this place and its flowers, not to mention old Nel—but still——"

"Still what? oh queen of the discontented!" enquired her companion, turning upon the fair young face, which looked down upon him, the full light of two most expressive eyes.

"Now, pray, my dear boy, don't look so uncommonly surprised because I confess to a weakness for the opera, and adore the orchestra of the Philharmonic; indeed, I fear, green trees, and ruralizing, as you would say, '*don't suit my book*—at any rate before the 12th of August, when the opera and Parliament simultaneously close,' because, forsooth, you male tyrants of the creation must e'en start off to Scotland to shoot the poor, pretty grouse——"

"Which, however, Miss Muriel Brandon—though so compassionate—by no means disdains, when roasted, with bread-sauce accompaniment!"

"Oh, fie! how can you talk of eating to a young lady? But I must pardon you, in consequence of your youth. A few years older, and you will know better."

"As if I was not, even now, two years your senior, fair lady!"

"True, but you look so young, I always fancy you are but fifteen."

"Well, well," said he, impatiently, and with a vexed look; "youth is a good fault, it cures itself daily: and, may-be, when I am a man, and you a woman, Muriel, we may perhaps both regret these days, and the age you now so much despise."

He spoke sadly—the clear eyes darkening as with a gloom. Woman like, the young girl hastened to dispel the momentary cloud. Laying her hand lightly on the arm of her friend, she said kindly,—

"Dear Gerald, why take my nonsense so seriously? You know I would not vex you for the world, or (smiling archly,) offend your manly dignity."

The boy's massive brow cleared as by magic, and with a charming, frank smile, he said—

"'When ruby lips thus plead, judgment must ever be given in their favour!' but, hark! the half-hour bell summons the fairest of the fair to the duty of the toilet; and as she usually takes three hours' adorning—"

"Provoking boy! I beg pardon—*young man!*" cried Muriel, rising, and running towards the house, Nelson bounding after her, fully bent on a game of

romps; but much disgusted at discovering his mistake, returning crest-fallen, or rather tail-fallen to his place on the grass beside his master. Just then a carriage is seen rounding the gravel walk: it stops at the front door, when the master of the house alights, just in time to make a hasty toilet previous to partaking of the turtle soup and fresh salmon, in which his soul delights.

To Dr. Petersham, the most fashionable physician of worldly and aristocratic London, we have now the supreme honour of introducing our readers—an honour we trust they will duly appreciate. This great man, we beg to premise, was never known, even in a passing manner, to allude to any female patient who could not boast a title to her name, though he occasionally condescended to an M.P., or the fashionable poet or painter of the day. Indeed, it was currently reported that the doctor had refused fabulous fees rather than allow his carriage to be seen north of Oxford Street, or east of Temple Bar, though we have been privately given to understand that the matter was frequently compromised by the worthy man's becoming occasionally the "*fare*" in a cab. It had been murmured, too, in half the *salons* of Belgravia, that Dr. Petersham was the con-

fidant, almost the father-confessor, of half the Duchesses, Marchionesses, and Countesses, dwelling within the charmed circle of Belgravia, Park Lane, or Grosvenor Square—nay, a whisper had gone forth that from Majesty itself he had received a very exceptional permission—yes, he had occasionally had the distinguished honour of embracing an infant Royal Highness, after having felt its royal pulse, and looked at its royal tongue. This very fashionable, and very imposing, London physician, was, of course, married—are not all respectable doctors in respectable England benedicts? His wife, one of a large family of sisters, had a little money of her own. Devotedly attached to her husband, and believing religiously that, king-like, he "could do no wrong," Mrs. Petersham felt deeply the honour the great man had done her in permitting her to bear his name—an honour which the doctor took care should be impressed on his wife's memory—frequently asserting in presence of the sisterhood and others, that, having very long debated which of the family he should distinguish by the offer of his hand, his final choice had fallen on the elder sister, not for her superior charms, but as being of the most suitable age for a man approaching middle life. All this was

heard in meekness by the gentle, loving soul, but her poor woman's heart must frequently have throbbed from wounded pride, and ached with silent, wifely sorrow, as the cold, selfish, worldly man poured out on her, who more than all merited the epithet of *patient*, the spleen he durst not vent on the fanciful, fine ladies whose imaginary ailments and guineas he considered it his duty to remove. Muriel, an unwilling listener, often felt the indignant blood mount to her cheek, but she, too, was silent, for she feared the stern, basilisk glance of her uncle, but though she sincerely pitied, she did not love her aunt—their natures were too antagonistic. Mrs. Petersham, though warm-hearted, was cold and undemonstrative in manner—prudish to a fault, she even beheld harm where none was ever dreamed of, it really was quite a pity that the doctor's choice had not fallen upon one of her sisters—for old maidhood was decidedly this lady's vocation, excepting indeed in her intense dislike to cats (and these animals, we must aver, she held in holy horror), Aunt Griselda was in all respects fitted for a life of single blessedness. Many a look of unmitigated disgust has poor Muriel discovered on this usually placid lady's features, when, with a heart overflowing with love for

every innocent member of God's dumb creation, she was more than once detected by Aunt Griselda in the housekeeper's apartment, caressing and fondling —nay, we are constrained to avow, actually kissing poor puss. Report had declared the doctor's niece heiress to a considerable fortune, but as report is notoriously at fault as regards ladies' fortunes, and, according to their own account, as to their ages also, the truth, where such delicate subjects are concerned, is notoriously hard to come at: we will be content, therefore, with assuring our readers, that our heroine had been left by her parents in an independent position as regards worldly goods, subject during her minority to the control of her uncle and guardian, Dr. Petersham.

CHAPTER II.

GRANDPAPA.

THE world, therefore, whose judgment is ever superficial, would doubtless have pronounced Miss Muriel Brandon a most fortunate young lady. Gifted by nature in no churlish way with those prime elements of happiness, health, talent, good looks, might not the future be said to be in her own power? Might it not safely be predicted, that in the lottery of life our heroine was in a fair way of winning a high prize, more especially as dame Fortune had herself weighted the scale with a golden balance? And the world, in fact, *did* so judge, with much show of reason, too; forgetting that the race is not always to the strong, nor the battle to the swift; unmindful of what a tangled web is woven the destiny of each daughter of Eve, so that a lifetime is too short for the unravelling thereof. Happy, thrice happy, they who look to a higher sphere in the sweet hope that there the crooked may be made straight, the

inexplicable explained, the mystery be no longer mysterious.

Muriel was an orphan; until the age of twelve she had been brought up by her maternal grandfather, and well had the old man supplied the place of a tender parent towards his youthful charge. A pretty villa in the environs of Havre was the scene of her early childhood; and it was here that the young girl received the first elements of her education, and learned to speak the French language with the accent of a native.

Perceiving at an early age in the little Muriel undoubted marks of a superior intelligence, the good old man devoted himself indefatigably to the instruction of his grandchild; so that at seven years of age, the young pupil was conversant with many of the leading facts of ancient and modern history, and with most of the fanciful myths which picture the poetic pages of the classics; a year later she devoured eagerly Pope's unique translation of the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer—now glowing with martial ardour, as in words of flame the poet recounts the daring deeds of the god-like Hector, great Ajax, or the fierce Achilles;--now weeping with the tender wife Andromache the dreaded fate of her lord;

peopling the woods, the springs, the ocean, with nymphs and naiads; beholding on each summer-cloud the dove-drawn chariot of the "laughter-loving queen," or the graceful, dignified form of the maid with the blue eyes and terrible "ægis;" for the old man had unveiled to the child the world of the ideal, and the child entered in and dwelt there. He taught her a little Italian, too—for he was of Tuscan origin—and the rudiments of Latin, which latter she found rather dry. She learned long poems by heart, and showed remarkable facility in so doing, except when called upon to commit to memory the drawling couplets of the drowsy Cowper,—whom Byron very justly repudiates as a brother in the art. But lines from Pope, and Milton, and Walter Scott, were repeated in the evening after coffee, to the surpassing delight of both master and pupil. Sometimes the good grandfather would say, "Ah! my child, when you are twenty, and the old man is dead and gone, you will forget me"—and the child would sigh and feel sad, as the death-shadow cast a gloom over her soul; and throwing her arms round his neck, she would assure him, amid tears and kisses, that she never, *never could* forget her kind and indulgent grandpapa.

A bitter trial was it to poor Muriel when, by desire of her uncle Petersham, she quitted the happy home of her childhood, in order to finish her education in a London boarding school: and the old man sorely missed his young pupil and playmate (for she was both), and he pined and grieved, and in the touching words of Scripture, "forgot to eat his bread;" and before the summer vacation came round, and on the very morning uncle Petersham's letter came with the intensely longed-for permission for his pet to spend her six weeks' holidays at home, the good, fond grandpapa passed away to a land where, for him, there could be "no more tears."

And Muriel mourned for her more than parent, —deeply, truly. She never forgot him, and in her evening orisons, a prayer for his happiness and welfare would, protestant though she was, struggle from her heart to her lips. But, in youth, grief is short-lived; surrounded by merry companions, and passionately devoted to study, the smile once more wreathed the ruby lip, and the dimpled cheek again glowed with the rose of health.

With all the depth and intensity of her nature, Muriel possessed a fund of fun and frolic, which of itself made her the life and leading spirit of the

school, and too frequently led her into scrapes. One of the most serious of these was in consequence of her having instigated the young ladies to act a play, and having, unknown to the governess, already commenced rehearsals; but the crowning misdemeanour of all consisted in having chosen for her dêbut the character of Norval in Home's tragedy of "Douglas," all and each of the *dramatis personæ*, with two exceptions, being of the sterner sex; and still worse, the costumes, horrible to relate, would necessitate a highly scandalous display of rather more than ankles, inasmuch as the scene of the tragedy was laid in the Highlands, where kilts and sandals are the order of the day,—very pretty, doubtless, for boys, but for young ladies scarcely decorous.

Our heroine had perhaps not considered all this, and her thoughtlessness was most severely reprimanded by the schoolmistress; and further penance was added unto her, in the shape of two hundred lines of "Young's Night Thoughts," which she was sentenced to get by rote (she would greatly have preferred Homer); and, to complete her mortification, Muriel was bid to write a theme on the profanity of theatricals in general, and desired to enlarge especially on the dreadful temptations into which such

profane amusements were likely to lead young ladies of fourteen.

The tears streamed down the cheeks of the unhappy girl, as her thoughts reverted to her dear grandpapa, and his poetic teachings; once again, in fancy, they sauntered together in those green meadows, where grew the cowslip and bright-eyed daisy, and the daffodil waved her golden locks in the summer's breeze; once again, she seemed to listen to the old man's musical voice, as he recounted how that Phaëton would insist on trying to drive the fiery steeds of the sun, and how thus doing he came to grief; and how the Titans made war with Jove; what more she might have dreamed we know not, for, awakening with a start, she felt a hard bony hand laid on her shoulder, and heard the harsh voice of Miss Prudence, the governess, suiting the word to the action, exclaim,

"Well, I do declare, Miss! you have not written one word of your theme. Retire to your room, Miss Brandon, I beg; and pray do not leave it till your task is performed;" and Muriel obeyed, and thus awoke to reality!

Eighteen months later she left school, much to her regret, for she had learned to love her severe but

kind-hearted governess, and had formed tender and affectionate friendships with many of her school-mates; still more, perhaps, did Muriel regret the lessons of music and singing she had taken with eminent professors; and besides, she had little taste for rusticating in a country village, with an aunt, the wife of a curate, with large family and small means. Yet, with this aunt it was settled our heroine should reside till the age of eighteen, when she would be of age, Dr. Petersham, thinking the two hundred pounds allowed during minority for his niece's maintenance would be of greater service to his poorer sister than to his prosperous self, and not caring, perhaps, to undertake so responsible a charge as that of a young heiress, with a fair share of beauty, and the usual feminine amount of self-will. It was therefore settled *nolens volens* that the young lady should reside during the next two years under the roof of her aunt, with an occasional visit to Uncle Petersham in May Fair at his pleasure. With the curate and his wife this story has but little in common; suffice it then to say, they were good-natured, homely, un-congenial people, blessed with a large family of various ages, from six months upwards.

Muriel had a pretty cheerful room allotted to her, through the latticed casement of which, embowered in jessamine, the lilacs and laburnums straggled in, filling the chamber with perfume, gazing somewhat indiscreetly on the neat French bed, whose snowy curtains fell like a cloud around the graceful form reposing there in innocence and virginal purity. In this dainty bower might be seen bookshelves filled with classic authors, mostly poets, of every clime, a small writing-table, with its elegant inkstand, a low easy chair, workbox, a goldfinch in its pretty cage, and a guitar adorned with a coquettish blue ribbon and tasteful bow; all of which imparted a festive air to the little sanctum, where its inmate might at least enjoy privacy and repose.

Here, thrown entirely on her own resources, did Muriel resolve to continue her own education; and, thus resolving, studied history, philosophy, science, languages, and — heaven help us! — I fear me even mathematics: in fact, our little heroine was decidedly in danger of becoming very blue in the stockings, for—with shame we confess it—she actually began greek. But music saved her, for it was with her a passion. Already a good pianist,

and possessing a lovely voice, which she managed with great taste and some science, many hours solemnly vowed to Euclid and the greek grammar were stolen by Apollo and the Muses; and Muriel's pretty little foot looked prettier still in the glass slipper of Cinderella than in the cerulian stockings of the strong-minded of the sex; and the expressive and well-chiselled lips were a thousand times more lovely, when inspired by Rossini, they gave out the brilliant tones of his "*Nacqui all' affanno*" than when repeating the greek verbs, or murmuring the solution of some difficult mathematical problem.

CHAPTER III.

MURIEL.

We do not think the most flippant and empty of Oxford or Cambridge undergraduates would have dared to apply to Muriel Brandon the epithet of a "deuced pretty girl," or a "d——ish fine one." They would have understood that the little pink and white milliner, or the pastry cook's black browed daughter, might feel flattered in being thus spoken of; but not fair Muriel—yet the pallid hero of the successful prize poem might, had he seen her, have added a line on "the starlight of woman's eyes;" or the prize essayist might have resolved to take as his next subject, "The lightning of an angel smile;" and those eyes, about whose true colour no two persons ever agreed, and that smile, might have haunted him for months; and yet we do not intend to claim for our young heroine the palm of perfect beauty. Muriel was indeed lovely rather

than beautiful, and more attractive even than lovely. The Italians would have termed her eminently "*simpatica.*" In childhood she won all hearts by the early womanliness of her character; later her child-like freshness and simplicity lent to the manners of the woman an almost irresistible charm. She literally flashed upon you, as a gleam of sunshine in early spring, which thrills the blood, and is felt in the very depths of our being; a brilliance as little resembling the meretricious sparkle of polite society as the ever-varying rose on her cheek was unlike the factitious bloom which fain would mask features haggard from midnight dissipation, miscalled pleasure. To the casual observer Muriel would be but the timid and retiring maiden, blushing when addressed, and seemingly all intent on her embroidery frame or painting; but one who might closely watch the eloquent countenance, would readily surprise the unbidden tear, or the passing flush of emotion, which the recital of some "golden deed," the expression of a lofty sentiment, or a passage from some favourite author, would ever call forth. To such would the electric flash of feeling reveal for a moment a wealth of intellect, a nobleness of nature, a tenderness of heart, as rare, as perilous to

woman—perilous, alas! to herself alone. Like that flower of surpassing loveliness, the magnolia of the Southern States of America, which changes colour if so much as a breath stirs its petals, or should the tiny and delicate humming bird so much as brush it in passing with its wing, such was this young girl; so sensitive to beauty and harmony, so painfully susceptible to all that is discordant, which jarred upon her finely strung nerves "like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh;" more than all, most of all, did music speak to the soul and senses of Muriel; it was to her a presence real and tangible, her youthful frame thrilled and vibrated to the passionate wailings of Weber, her heart melted to the tender strains of Mozart, or swelled with religious awe as the sublime chords of Handel echoed through the vaulted aisles of some cathedral, and tears of intense bliss would well from the young eyes yet undimmed by sorrow, and the childish bosom would heave and throb with an emotion delicious as incomprehensible to natures less harmoniously and less richly endowed.

It may readily be conceived, that with so passionate an appreciation of the beautiful in art and nature, would be united a most fastidious horror of

the vulgar and common-place; and in truth Muriel quickly detected beneath a refined and polished exterior a dwarfish intelligence and a grovelling soul. Unlike the majority of women, she was incapable of appreciating mere physical beauty in the opposite sex, unless combined with mental qualifications. Genius, intellect, talent, these were her idols—and here lay her danger; a being possessing these good gifts might readily, by her glowing imagination, be endowed with every moral virtue or tender sentiment, and become to her an ideal—a dream of beauty. From such a dream, how sure, how sad the awakening!

CHAPTER IV.

LISLE COURT.

LISLE COURT, Warwickshire, the seat of the ancient and noble family of De Lisle, is one of the most time-honoured of the world-renowned homes of old England. Home—how sweet a word! how essentially English! The French have their "*chez soi*," the Italians their "*casa*," the Germans their "*haus*," the Yankees their "*board*;" but we bold Britons have, thank God, our *home*, poor, may-be, small, simple, but not the less, whether palace or cottage—home—ever sweet home! Unlike those antique remains of a feudal age, whose castellated ruins greet the eye of the traveller, as, floating down the rapid stream, he scans either bank of the storied Rhine; the stately mansion of the De Lisles stands amid its broad acres, proudly defiant of time and change. In the massive thickness of its walls, the gloom of its oriel windows, the rare and quaint de-

signs of its tapestries, the archæologist might discover unmistakable signs of the mediæval ages. Lisle Court, of course, possessed its state room, with fancifully-carved bed, beneath whose richly decorated canopy and heavy curtains of somewhat tarnished gold brocade, many a head, weary of the weight of a crown (did tradition speak true) had sought, and perchance found, a temporary repose. Nor less did each venerable and gnarled oak, flinging its broad shadow over these lordly lands, tell the tale of centuries gone by. One of the noblest of these monarchs of the forest, had, (as the white-haired lodge-keeper loved to tell,) offered the shelter of his protecting arms, during some sudden shower, to the golden-haired Elizabeth, England's virgin queen, as on milk-white palfrey she passed near by, in those days when the gallant Earl of Leicester fêted his liege lady in his Castle of Kenilworth, and, as legends go, dared to woo "the fair vestal throned in the west," while the proud Elizabeth stooped to listen, tenderly chiding, with a blush and a sigh, the boldness of her noble Dudley.

Deep in the recess of an oriel window, in the west wing of the mansion we have just described, sat a lady, whose rich and tasteful attire well suited the

graceful, matronly dignity of her mien, and bespoke her at once the mistress of the mansion and lady of the broad lands on which she gazed.

The Baroness de Lisle was of that age which, however alarming to would-be youthful belles, has been pronounced by George the Fourth, when combined with personal attractions, to be the *ne plus ultra* of feminine fascination. Lady de Lisle had been a great beauty—if it is fair to speak in the past tense of one whose skin is still smooth and polished as marble, and whose hair is dark, glossy, and thick, as the plumage of the raven; for, if a closer inspection might discover here and there a thread of silver glittering amid the jetty tresses, he would be but a pitiful churl who should mark such failing, rather than dwell with respectful admiration on the Juno-like features, and those soft, dove-like glances which so sweetly modified the serenely beautiful but somewhat haughty expression of the exquisitely-formed mouth and chin, nor own that the tall, stately form had gained, rather than lost, as the slightness of girlhood had given place to the well-developed roundness of life's meridian. Habited in a closely-fitting robe of the richest black velvet, her only ornament consisted of a brooch—the portrait of a child—

set in brilliants, which fastened a collar of the most costly lace, and a bracelet of hair, the clasp of which was likewise a portrait, that of a youth—the child grown to manhood—also magnificently set in priceless gems. The open sleeve, fringed with the same delicate lace as the collar, showed to advantage an exquisitely-moulded arm, and a hand, whose purity and softness might well put to shame that of many a younger woman. A Marie Stuart head-dress half concealed and half displayed the glossy braids which shaded the broad, intellectual brow.

The Baroness sat at her embroidery frame, but from time to time she raised her eyes and looked from the window, which indeed commmanded a right noble prospect. Far as eye could reach lay the broad lands which for centuries had borne the name of the oldest family in the shire. Immediately beneath, lay a parterre, in summer crowded with the choicest flowers, then a spacious park, over whose undulating slopes the stately hart and timid roe bounded at liberty; in the distance a noble forest, and a silvery lake, on which the wintry sun was now shedding his palest beam; and far, far away in the distance, where the misty horizon melts into the cloudy sky of England, the farm lands and corn

grounds of the tenants of De Lisle. The winds moaned and sighed in the trees, and some snow-flakes were beginning to fall.

The Lady had pushed her tapestry from her, as she gazed on the landscape, seemingly lost in thought. At length she rose, and went to the chimney to look again upon the antique timepiece, whose wonted chime had been for some time—she knew not how long—unheeded. "Four o'clock," she murmured, "and Gerald not yet arrived! pray Heaven there has been no accident of the train."

She rang the bell, and immediately the white-headed groom of the chambers appeared.

"Stephens, will you have the goodness to send the housekeeper? I wish to know if all is ready in Sir Bouverie's apartment."

"I have just seen Mrs. Jackson, if your ladyship pleases, and she told me that there was a splendid fire in my young master's room, and that she had placed wine and sandwiches in case Sir Bouverie might like to take some refreshment before dinner. and I made so bold as to go see myself, my lady; and I drew the couch to the fire, and the arm-chair, Master Gerald—I beg pardon, my lady—Sir Bouverie, used allers to sit in, and I lays also the

papers and new books from Lunnon on the oak table, for says I to myself, her ladyship sha'n't have no call to think we have neglected our dear young master."

"Thank you, good Stephens," said the Baroness, smiling; for, though she never suffered her menials to speak, except in monosyllables, in her presence, when not absolutely necessary, old Stephens was an exception; for he had held office in her grandfather's time, at Lisle Court, and his father and grandfather, and their fathers before them, from time immemorial, had acted as seneschals in the family of De Lisle; therefore the affectionate garrulity of the old man was always tolerated by his mistress.

Pity the good old times when servants kept their places, and really were attached to their masters, and in their humble sphere were watched over and tended all as members of one family; pity, we say, such good old times are fast melting away, as snow-flakes in the sun-beam. Equality, liberty, and fraternity are fine words, but the first two can never be, for Nature herself forbids—forming some to command, others to serve; "*fraternity*," ought, however, to be not only the watchword, but the actual state of what is in common parlance termed, Christendom, or the kingdom of Christ.

Old Stephen was summoned from his mistress's presence by the roll of a carriage, followed by the clang of the front door bell. The old man sped fast as his tottering legs could carry him, yet scarcely had he reached the end of the corridor, and attained the head of the grand staircase, when he was met by the youthful heir of the De Lisles, bounding rather than walking, impatient to greet the fond mother hastily advancing to meet him.

Again and again she clasped her boy to her heart, gazing withal fondly and proudly on the frank, open countenance, the broad intellectual brow, and soft, brown curls which proclaimed the youth— the original of the portrait, both on bracelet and brooch, before-mentioned, as worn by that high-born lady.

And well might that mother gaze proudly on those noble lineaments, which indeed bore a most striking resemblance to her own. There were the same chiselled features, the same pure, colourless complexion, the same commanding stature, and thorough-bred look we have remarked in the Baroness, only the lady's soft grey eyes, in Bouverie were of the deepest violet; and if the curve of her lip in repose shewed more pride than did that of her son, still

when wreathed by the bright intellectual smile peculiar to both—it expressed at least equal sweetness of disposition. Later in life the fresh trustfulness of youth over, the young man might grow cold, and haughty, and severe—you read that, in the clear, firm cut of the mouth, and the rounded outline of the finely-formed chin, but just now Gerald was of a nature soft and tender, almost to a fault.

The Baroness idolised her only son, viewing in him the last hope of a time-honoured race, the heir of a barony which had descended into the female line, and was vested in her own person. She adored him; nor the less did young Gerald worship his mother. Could it be possible he ever should have place in his heart for another affection, it would be a different, not a fonder feeling; far, far away, beyond the possibility of rivalry, his mother must ever be enshrined in his inmost soul. As the devotee worships the virgin mother of the Lord, so must she who bore him, ever be to him, next his God; in him it was a religion, in her an idolatry.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARONESS.

In the small octagon dining room which formed part of the suite of apartments in the west wing of the building, occupied by the mistress of the mansion, the cosy *tête-à-tête* dinner was served to the young Sir Bouverie de Lisle and his mother. The service, (as customary in the best English families) was ceremonious, as though a banquet was holden, and guests were bidden to the state dining hall.

Massive silver salvers, exquisitely chased goblets, elaborately worked tankards, graced the side-board, the dishes and plates also were of the same precious metal, and gleamed brightly as a mirror. Various kinds of game, the choicest fish, forced vegetables, hothouse fruit, in season, and out of season, together with the oldest and rarest wines, were always served for the young heir, who we confess did ample justice to the viands.

Dinner over, old Stephens, ever the presiding genius at the social board, opened a bottle of the very oldest port, and after rolling two easy chairs near the hearth, on which blazed an enormous log of wood, throwing out almost as much light as heat, he retired to the housekeeper's room, where, in company with that lady, my lady's lady, the head coachman, and the *under* butler, as he was ever and much to his disgust called by old Stephens, many of the delicacies which had been removed untouched from their master's table, were partaken of with infinite gusto. Meanwhile the Baroness and her son enjoyed heartily their *tête-à-tête* over their wine and walnuts, before the glorious English fire.

"Tell me now, dear Gerald, something of Oxford," said the lady; "any chance of a double first? The De Lisles have ever been distinguished, not perhaps as writers, but certainly as elegant scholars. Mr. Pitt, you know, is a family connexion, and he was premier, at one and twenty."

"True, mother, but then Mr. Pitt was one in a million, and a lucky fellow also."

"I am aware, dear Gerald, that talent unfavoured by fortune is rarely successful; but in your case, my son, the capricious goddess does not show her wonted

fickleness, and seriously, I wish you early, as the sole representative of our family, to take a stand in the county."

"I trust my dear mother will never have reason to complain of her son, either politically or otherwise," said Sir Bouverie, lifting the fair hand which rested in his, fondly and reverently to his lips, and Lady de Lisle, smiling tenderly on her boy, still pursued aloud the train of thought which had brought the light to her eyes, and the haughty curl to her lip,—

"In about three years you will enter into the inheritance of the estates which go with the baronetcy; they are small—and—I should wish you"—here she hesitated—"to—to manage the whole of the property; the responsibility is heavy for a woman, and oh! how gladly shall I yield it up to you, dear boy. You will then possess a rent-roll equal to most of the county families."

"Stay, dearest, too kind mother. I cannot, indeed I cannot, accept such generosity; my father's small estates are ample for me, if my mother will still give me hospitality in her castle. Dear old Lisle Court is hers by inheritance, and must remain hers,"—embracing her fondly—"I was going to say

till she becomes an angel, but that cannot be, for is she not one already ?"

The Baroness called him obstinate, self-willed child, stroking all the while the clustering curls, declaring that she must and would have implicit obedience. "I can still keep house for you," she said, "till—till,"—and the moisture trembled in her eye, and her voice faltering a little, a very little—"you present Lisle Court with a younger and a fairer mistress."

"A younger, but never a fairer, mother mine," said Bouverie with gallantry. "Am I not your sworn true knight, bound by every law of chivalry to vaunt your peerless charms above those of every other fair ?"

"Ah, flatterer. If ladies of my sober age are caught by your bonny face, and winsome tongue, pity for the maiden who in evil hour 'sucks the poison of thy honied vows,'" said his mother, laughing. "But apropos, they tell me that that little girl, your playfellow when you went to Havre to learn French, has grown very pretty; is it so? I think you said she was with the Petershams in the summer at Richmond."

Gerald had looked away as his mother spoke, and

as he now turned towards her, to answer, it seemed as if the blaze of the fire had cast its warm glow on his usually pale cheek. "Indeed Miss Brandon is very lovely, and promises later to be still more beautiful."

"In what style? Can you describe her? I remember her a pretty, bright little fairy, with sunny ringlets, and the eyes and ways of a woman; a merry little sprite who loved flowers and laughter and romps, but would at a cold or severe look, quickly melt into tears—a sensitive plant; a bud formed to wear in the bosom. Had I been blessed with a daughter, Gerald, I think I should have wished for just such a little pet."

"And truly," pursued the boy with enthusiasm, "you would scarcely, could you now see Muriel Brandon, think otherwise; only a shade has fallen on the once golden curls, and the sweet eyes express perhaps a deeper tenderness; and if the rosy lips laugh less frequently, their smile is far, far brighter."

"In short," interrupted the Baroness, "the little fairy has become a coquettish woman, weaving her spells around the unwary. Ah! Bouverie my son, beware the wiles of our sex; you are high born and heir to large estates—you will have to learn the

sad lesson that ladies' hearts are to be bought, or if not their hearts, certainly their hands, and young, handsome, talented as you may be, still you may not be loved for yourself alone."

"Ah! but Muriel—"

The Baroness slightly frowned. "I am making no personal allusion; the young lady may be very charming, but Sir Gerald Bouverie De Lisle, heir to a peerage, has the right to look for almost perfection, in a wife. It is not every pretty girl that I could bear to have as my successor, and the mother of the future heirs of my name and title; my son, make me happy, promise me faithfully that you will never woo one for your wife, until you have sought and received your mother's approval; will you not promise, my own?"

Sir Bouverie hesitated for one moment, and then placing his right hand in hers, he said, "I know, mother, you have my happiness at heart more than your own; I rely too implicitly on your judgment: I will and I do promise what you require." And the mother was happy, for she knew that she could trust him implicitly, knowing well how indissoluble are the silken fetters of honour, rivetted too by the hand of affection.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM.

MEANWHILE in the housekeeper's room, the supper having been demolished to the satisfaction of the partakers thereof, the coachman and the under butler left the room to the ladies, and went to enjoy a pipe together.

"Allow me, Mrs. Flimsey—here's to your very good 'elth;" and our old friend Stephens, after filling to the brim the glasses of the two women, with some excellent spiced home-made wine, raised his own tumbler to his lips, smiling and bowing, after the approved manner of his betters. "Now, one more glass, to drink the 'elth of our young master and good mistress—God bless them!"

The females did not say nay either to the wine or the toast, while my lady's lady—the elegant Mrs. Flimsey—observed, as she sipped the comforting beverage—

"And a more beautifuller lady I never did set eyes on than my lady, for her age: bless you, her hair is as black as black, and all down to her waist; and then her neck, as white as snow—though, since Sir Bouverie's death, I never can get her to wear a low dress—the more the pity, say I."

"Ah! Mrs. Flimsey," rejoined Mrs. Jackson; "if you had only seen my lady twenty-three year ago, as I did, and dressed her, pretty lamb, for her wed-din'; for, says she—'Nursey,'—she allers called me Nursey, the dear, because, you know, I were her nurse—'Nursey,' says she, 'shall dress me for my marriage, as she did for my christening;' and I did—and a sweeter bride never was, with her pretty look, so proud, and yet so modest—it done your eyes good to see her—she looked for all the world like a queen; but then, you know, she was a Baroness in her own right—"

"And," interrupted Mrs. Flimsey, "the bride-groom—how did he look?"

"Well, to say the truth, Sir Bouverie was a fine man—but oh! the offers my lady has refused!—there was lords, and dukes, and members of Parliament, all at her feet, and she so proud, and so cold, too! the Duke of what-d'ye-call-'em (the Marquis

of Lostwithiel as was), he was a dying for her, yet she chose her cousin."

"I 'spose she loved Sir Bouverie dearly, eh, Mrs. Jackson?"

"Well, I can't exactly say, you know, Mrs. Flimsey, but I *have* heared—"

"Mrs. Jackson, ma'am," growled old Stephens from his easy chair in the chimney corner, "your tongue will be the ruin of you, ma'am!"

"Well, I'm sure! and pray, Mr. Stephens, who asked your opinion? I'm sartain sure as how I'm saying no harm, and things is come to a pretty pass if a body mayn't talk."

"Besides," said Mrs. Flimsey, coming to the assistance of her friend, "and may-be *I've* heard said as how my lady did love some one, and as how, not being quite as rich and grand as she, he durstn't ask her, and she sacrificed her affections like!"

"What do you or I know about such stuff?" grumbled Stephens; "may-be she *did* marry to keep the name and estates of the family together—that's neither here nor there; but if she looked first and last for the honour of the family—she, a Baroness by inheritance—why, I say, she only showed she was true quality, like her father before her, God

bless her! and a dutifuller wife and a tenderer mother never stepped than my lady, let who will say the contrary."

"In course, Mr. Stephens, no offence, I hope, but I hear my lady's bell, and must be going; so I wish you both a very good night."

Mr. Stephens's temper was somewhat ruffled by his slight skirmish with the women-kind, as he called them, and poor Mrs. Jackson could get nothing from him but grunts of affirmation and sullen silence, if his opinion clashed with hers. However, he had to listen to a long account of the Glengarrow family, with whom her sister was housekeeper, and from whom she had just received a budget of news.

"DEAR SISTER," began the letter with which she favoured Mr. Stephens—"this comes 'oping that you are well, as it leaves me at present. We are now at Castle Glengarrow, as you may perceive, and there is some talk of Lady Guinever's marriage—who was presented last year, you know—and Lady Mildred is to come out next spring, though she is only sixteen, and will be then sixteen and-a-half—because the Duchess does not like to go out alone, in case Lady Guinever marries, and young Lord Glentworth looks rather pale and sickly—he is rather older, I believe,

than Sir Gerald Bouverie de Lisle, whom, by-the-bye, the Duchess thinks the world of, and holds him up as an example to my lord every day—at least so the governess tells the French maid, and the Duke is very often at Windsor, or in London, for cabinet consols, I think they call 'em, and it is thought one day he may be offered the prime minister—leastways so Mr. Fletcher, his Grace's gentleman, says—and Mr. Fletcher really is quite a scholard, and allers goes with his Grace when the Duke goes to stay with her Majesty. I did not tell you that Lady Mildred is thought to be a wonderful beauty, as indeed she is—howsomever, Lady Guinever is more my fancy, as indeed I hear all the folks say; yet she is not nearly so pretty as her sister promises to be—and Lady Mildred, though more than a year younger, is already taller by half a head—and such a figure—'the grace and mien of a queen!' as Mr. Fletcher says, and—"

A loud snore from Mr. Stephens, who started, woke, and went to bed, caused Mrs. Jackson to cease her reading for that night, and also to seek her couch.

CHAPTER VII.

SPRING THOUGHTS.

In this every day world of ours, how swift, how ceaseless the flight of time! wherefore, then, in the page of romance, should his pinions droop wearily? We are well aware that the popular novelist loves mostly to crowd the interest of a life into three or four weeks, or at the most, months, as if a few trifling love passages between a stripling and a girl yet in her teens could ever concentrate and absorb the hopes, the fears, aye, and the affections too, of existence, as if marriage did not open to us the door of stern reality rather than, according to the received formula of fairy and operatic lore, leave us evermore in the enjoyment of perfect bliss, and a numerous progeny; the latter, it is true, is by no means rare, but the former, how rarely, if ever, is it attained!

Therefore, since Muriel sat with Gerald on that pretty lawn, sloping down to the Thames, we will

suppose a twelvemonth to have elapsed. And now Spring, gladsome Spring, has returned, with balmy breath, strewing the earth with flowers and buds, waking the song of the cuckoo in the grove—

"Oh, blithe new comer, I have heard,
I hear thee, and rejoice,
Oh! cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?"

And who has not felt his heart throb, who has not held his breath to hear the first note of the cuckoo?

Wordsworth, most devout of Nature's worshippers, thou most spiritual of her bards, well, passing well, didst thou sing of the voice; the mystery, ever heard, ever unseen! Noble old man, thou advocate of virtue and high souled piety, truest philosopher, whose days shone calm and peaceful as the bosom of the lovely English lake, on whose green banks thou lovedst to weave thoughts of beauty and divinest love into verses of music, thou hast gone the way of all the living, and thy place knoweth thee no more; but deep in our inmost souls resound the harmonies of thine inspired song, whose echoes shall fall upon the ears and be murmured by the lips of nations yet unborn, when we and our generation shall have passed away to where thou art!

On the brightest and gladdest of May mornings young Muriel awoke from her rosy slumbers, sprang from her couch, and gliding to the window, opened the casement, letting in the perfumed air, which entered with a jocund company of lilacs, graceful laburnum flowers, and sweet-scented sprigs of delicate jessamine, all striving to enter the fairy bower where the youngest and fairest of Titania's band (as in very truth she seemed) stood, foot in slipper, drinking in the exquisite freshness and fragrance of the morning air. Her glossy nut-brown hair fell over her shoulders in rich waves, her cheek is glowing with health and youth, her eyes beaming with that clear, hopeful brightness, peculiar to the young, her heart bounding within her innocent breast, for Muriel felt particularly happy that day, not altogether because of the weather, (though that may have made her spirits still more buoyant), but because of a letter which had arrived the day before per post, and was just now lying open on the toilet before her. The envelope was written in a precise, formal hand, the superscription as follows :—

Miss Brandon,
Rev. A. Alston,
Mornington.

Muriel had read it before more than once, nevertheless she took it up and read it again— .

Charles Street, Barklay Square,
Monday.

"My dear Muriel,

"Your Uncle and myself have been thinking that it is about time for your annual visit to us; if, therefore, you have no more pleasant engagement in prospect, my husband desires me to invite you here for five or six weeks. Any day in next week that you please we can receive you.

"With our united love to yourself, and Mr. and Mrs. Alston, whose children, we trust, are well,

"I am,

"Your affectionate Aunt,

"Griselda Petersham."

"Pleasanter engagement, indeed," soliloquised the young lady, twisting the envelope in her rose-tipped fingers. "Not very likely here, I should think; and what could to me be pleasanter than beautiful aristocratic London, the 'mart of intelligence,' as some one calls it—I forget who—" and then she paused, as visions of operas, theatres, parties, &c., crowded through her active brain,

"True," she continued, "Aunt Griselda is not exactly the chaperon I should have chosen; she is too precise, and uncle is not particularly kind, but they have a charming literary circle, and who knows, I may marry a poet, perhaps. Gerald, too, I shall see; dear, good Gerald!" she mused; "what would I not give for a brother just like him, he will be very, handsome too, when a man—now he is but a boy, happily for me, or aunt Griselda would think it improper in me to be so friendly with him. Good gracious—" looking at her tiny Swiss watch, Sir Bouverie's birthday gift, "it is half-past six; I must dress."

Thus saying, she proceeded with the duties of the toilet, feeling quite maternal towards her friend, for it is certain that intellectual girls like our heroine greatly prefer men, even many years their senior, to youths of their own standing. And now the beautiful hair is braided, and bound up in a rich knot behind, the sweet face looks like a rose, fresh from her bath of dew; the girlish form is arrayed in a simple but clean muslin dress, almost ethereal in its lightness and grace; the short but fervent prayer is said, and there is yet half an hour to family-worship and breakfast. What shall she do to fill up the time? Aunty's answer is already written and

despatched. Shall she read?—No; there is not time. Work—we must confess that Muriel hated her needle. Shall she draw?—here again the shortness of the time forbade. She cast her eyes towards the blue Heavens, she beheld the delicate foliage of the trees, listening the while to the blythe carol of the birds, the cuckoo's cheery note ever and anon in the distance. Then her eye fell on the quiet church yard, with its numerous grave stones, adjoining the flower garden, and a tender, serious melancholy beyond her years o'ershadowed her young brow. A moment she mused silently, then in a low, musical voice, improvised the following lines which took the form of a sonnet—

"Fairest of days, loveliest in spring's, sweet prime!
Earnest of comfort to the grief-worn breast,
Breathes there the man by selfish woes so prest
That thou for him lift'st thy glad voice in vain?
Oh, bid him heavenward raise his drooping eye,
And view, fit emblem of the eternal mind,
Yon changeless, cloudless, pure, unruffled sky,
Till earth, with all her cares, lie far behind.
And should a little fleecy cloud perchance,
Serenely wafted through the silent air,
Sail swiftly o'er Heaven's beautiful expanse,
Then melt, like some bright dream of sacred seer.
Oh! whisper thus life's fleeting joys decay,
Then let thy heart from earth be rent away."

The joyous clang of the breakfast bell put to flight the muse for the nonce. The good curate, punctual to a moment, insisted on punctuality in his household, so our poetess flew down stairs, arriving just in time to take her place before the chamber organ, and accompany the hymn with which the family commenced the devotions which always preceded the morning, meal, and concluded the day's work. The singing over, a chapter from the Bible was read, then a few short prayers, after which the servants left the room, and breakfast was immediately served—thus each day. Three days of happy and busy preparation for the much longed for visit—three days of darning, button-sewing, of running-in of strings, making up of bows for the throat or hair, also of sorting the music to be taken, and separating it from that to be left behind—of packing of boxes with summer fancies, winter solids being stowed away in moth-proof cupboards, smelling of camphor or savory with pepper. How Muriel congratulated herself when all was over, and her trunks corded and carried down by the gardener, she entered the pony chaise, and was driven by that worthy to the station.

The journey passed without incident. Comfort-

ably ensconced in the centre compartment of the ladies' carriage, her little head full of the most charming aërial castles, the fair young traveller literally started, on the conductor of the train demanding her ticket. She even kept that official waiting at least one minute, as she searched pocket, purse, and travelling bag for that precious piece of card. Arrived at the terminus Muriel perceived the Doctor's carriage in waiting, also the Doctor's livery by which she divined the footman, for these worthies are in the habit of changing masters every twelve-months with a view to "bettering themselves," so that the Doctor's John may next year stand behind the carriage of an M.P.'s lady, and yet another spring may see him, if so fortunate as to reach six feet in stature, all powder silk stockings, and tights, supporting the fat hand of some dowager marchioness, or the fairy fingers of some newly made countess, as she steps heavily, or lightly, from her barouche or britzska into Storr and Mortimer's, or Howell and James's, as the case may be. This year's John therefore being shewn the luggage, the young lady, whose heart was beating wildly with unconfessed, uncomprehended hopes, fluttering delights, and timid virginal bashfulnesses, sprung into the capacious

chariot and was slowly transported by the sober-paced well-worked horses, towards the aristocratic or west end of town. The train having entered the terminus at five, Muriel found herself in Hyde Park, through which her route lay, just about the hour of the fashionable promenade. As she passed, suddenly a movement is perceived amongst the brilliant crowd of pleasure seekers, and the Doctor's chariot, which was following in line, now stops with the others and draws up on one side. Immediately after, a low phaeton, drawn by four splendid horses, with postillions and outriders, passes at full speed. A lady, fresh and fair, in the full bloom of youthful womanhood, and a gentleman, noble and distinguished looking in a pre-eminent degree, are its occupants. Nor needs it that all heads should uncover, to inform Muriel that the lady who so graciously returns the respectful salute of the bystanders is no less a person than the sovereign who reigns so despotically *in the hearts* of her people. The tears spring to the girl's eyes as she looks fondly and proudly on her Queen. "God bless her," she softly murmurs; "may she ever be happy as now, our good and lovely Queen." Muriel is so glad she has seen Victoria so near, and of course, as all young ladies

do, she too thinks Prince Albert the handsomest man in the world.

The carriage passes on slowly, very slowly, for the crowd is great and the stoppages frequent. Our country belle feasts her eyes on the elegant toilettes, the lovely faces, the brillaint equipages, and now her eye, which like a butterfly has been roving from flower to flower, is fixed by an equestrian party, because one of its number, a young lady, appears to her the most exquisitely lovely being she ever beheld. Mounted on a steed of high mettle, which she manages as only an Englishwoman can—her figure slight and commanding, every movement seems replete with grace—a blond with the most perfect features, and a skin transparent, with the tint of that rose we name the "maiden's blush." And oh! such hair, just like a sunbeam. Our heroine was dazzled by so much loveliness. There was another lady of the party, an older gentleman, and a remarkably fine-looking young man, whose figure appeared symmetry itself. His face was turned from Muriel, who, nevertheless, caught sight of a pair of dark-brown, well-curled moustaches. She thinks this cavalier must be handsomer even than Prince Albert, and at once decides that he must be the affianced lover of the high

born young beauty at his side. At this moment the gentleman turns his face towards her, but his eyes are fixed on his fair companion.

Muriel threw herself half out of the window, for the party has already passed. "It is—no—yes—it is Gerald." Gerald one year older—ten years more manly, twenty years handsomer. How a trifle has the power of changing one's mood! The young girl leant back in the carriage, her cheerfulness already fled, yet she could not have explained, even to herself, the cause of this so sudden change in her feelings. She certainly did not love Sir Bouverie; she was above the narrow vice of envy, and firmly believed in a friendship of an almost brother whom she hoped shortly to see. But who may fathom the mysteries which lie hidden in the heart of a young maiden?

CHAPTER VIII.

DOCTOR AND MRS. PETERSHAM.

MURIEL had now been some weeks at the house of her uncle, and though we dare not assert that her stay in the great metropolis had altogether satisfied her hopes and expectations (what girl of vivid imagination has ever yet escaped disappointment?) still she had not, on the whole, passed an unpleasant time in Charles Street. The usual spring exhibitions had been duly patronized by Aunt Griselda, and Muriel had been taken once to the opera, where Grisi, Mario, Tamburini, and Lablache still formed the immortal quartette, which has never been replaced, and will not readily be forgotten. Perhaps our heroine's greatest pleasure, however, consisted in the lessons she was enabled to take in vocal and instrumental music from professors of *note* in both senses of the word, and in practising for whom her mornings were fully taken up. One slight circumstance,

unnoticed by others, had, we must confess, contributed not a little to lessen Muriel's enjoyment, more than perhaps she cared to own to herself. She had not yet seen her old friend Gerald. He had, it is true, called twice, and left his card; but then he had chosen the fashionable hour for calling when all the world are supposed to be out, and when he must have known that she and Aunt Griselda were finishing the day by driving the over-worked horses, jobbed by the Doctor, their daily round of shopping or card-leaving; we cannot say *visiting*, for that implies the probability at least of seeing the persons visited; whereas, in London, everybody hopes to find his, or rather her, dear friends from home; and consequently, chooses for calling the hour propitious to such wish. But with Sir Bouverie it surely was not so, unless he were indeed greatly changed, and that his friend could not bear to allow. Nevertheless, Muriel was much mortified; she could not but fear that these formal calls were but the expression of the merest empty civility from a well-bred young man, whose time was now too pleasantly occupied to admit of his wasting a thought on his former playmate. An invitation to dinner, too, from Dr. Petersham, had been met with a note of polite "regrets

that a prior engagement," &c., &c., according to the usual style of fashionable deception. Had Sir Bouverie desired to change the kindly sentiments of his former companion into those of a more tender nature, he could not have taken a surer method of doing so. With a girl of imagination and feeling, the great secret of winning her heart is first to interest her fancy, and then to cast obstacles in the way of constant intercourse with the person at the moment in possession of her thoughts: absence and difficulties will effect more in one month than would a year of constant and unrestrained intercourse under the eye of approving friends; and the young lady may end in making a hero of romance, even out of a very commonplace person indeed. In the present case, however, Gerald was anything but a commonplace person in Muriel's eyes; his youth alone stood in his light; that and their familiar companionship as of brother and sister had hitherto left no room for illusions; reality,—pleasant, happy reality,—had usurped the place of phantasy, without which there can be no love.

One morning, towards the end of June, the trio being seated at breakfast in the somewhat dark and dingy room in Charles Street appropriated to that

meal, the doctor looking up from the *Times* and a plate of grilled chicken, said to his wife:

"By the way, my dear, have you received Lady de Lisle's invite for the 30th?"

"Yes, love," replied his meek spouse; "her ladyship's footman brought the card last night."

A placid smile of contentment stole over the Doctor's large face as he replied,

"Very good, Griselda; you will, of course, go. It is, I understand, a musical party: all the world will be there."

The Doctor spoke with evident self-complacency; for London society is very arbitrary, and though fashionable doctors are admitted to intimacy, and to the dinner tables of their aristocratic patients, the case with their unfashionable partners is widely different: doctors, artists, musicians, even authors, are received *as professionals*, nothing more; they are *in* the charmed circles, but not *of* them; being patronized by the great London world, rather than received on equal terms, they cannot, of course, present their wives to the high-born beauties, who queen it in the gorgeous halls of fashion. For this happy consummation did our ambitious Doctor toil day and night to get his wife

asked by the countess of this, or my lady that; not that, good worthy man, he cared one straw about his gentle, patient lady, but he felt that to be received as a physician in houses where he could not present his wife, was to be treated a shade above the butler or the valet, and to be placed on an equal footing with the music master, or the bearded signor, who taught the lovely Lady Adela or Julia the art of squalling; therefore did the Doctor's countenance wear a very self-satisfied air as he finished his muffin that morning, for the Baroness de Lisle was a very great lady indeed, who had been in her youth one of the leaders of *ton*, and who might at any moment, if she pleased, again resume the sceptre she had once wielded with such grace. Muriel had all this time been a silent though not uninterested listener, as the transparent crimson which momentarily flushed her cheek, but which now had paled visibly, as she sat in all the pangs of a painful suspense, might have proved to her uncle and aunt, had they looked towards the young girl. The Doctor, however, quietly finished his breakfast before he condescended to address his niece; when he said, turning towards her:

"As for you, child, you can dine that day and

spend the evening with the sisters;" so he always termed his wife's family.

Poor Muriel, from pale now turned almost white, so sick had hope deferred made her young heart. The Doctor thought she must faint, but, not caring much whether she did or not, made no observation. Silence, however, was broken by Aunt Griselda, who said, in a gentle voice, that Lady de Lisle had been good enough to include "our niece in her invitation."

"Impossible! You must have read it wrong; get me the note. How should her ladyship know that the girl is here? Go get it at once."

The obedient wife rose, ascended the stairs, and fetched the card from the drawing-room table. The Doctor looked,—

"Yes, true enough: Dr. and Mrs. Petersham and Miss Brandon."

This time the Doctor frowned; he disliked the idea of introducing his pretty niece into fashionable society; why, we do not pretend to say, except that he disliked his blood relations,—perhaps because his family were not exactly of the "*haute volée*" into which he panted to enter even by the back door. He spoke decisively and aloud—"Out of the question, Griselda; Muriel cannot go."

Then perceiving that the flush of hope on the poor girl's cheek had again given place to a death-like pallor, he said, savagely,—"What is the matter, child, that you turn all the seven prismatic colours in the same number of seconds?"

Muriel tried to smile, for her uncle was a joker, though his wit was often of a malignant nature, but the effort was too much for her; tears started to her eyes, and her reply was smothered by a sob. Kind-hearted Aunt Griselda came to the rescue:

"Indeed, dear," she said, addressing her husband, "I see no reason why Muriel should not go; I will see that she has a pretty new dress:" then, heedless of the ominous shake of the head of the domestic "thunderer," she pursued—"Besides, the Baroness, might well be affronted if we do not take Muriel, having been so condescending as to include her in the invitation."

The good lady had unwittingly touched the right chord in the Doctor's selfish, worldly soul; offend Lady de Lisle, indeed! that was not for one moment to be risked: so the master rose, nodded, with a "Well, we will see," and *Times* in hand, left the room to await in his study the visits of his aristocratic invalids, and their much coveted guineas.

Muriel turned a grateful look on her aunt, and for the first time felt disposed to put her arms round her neck and give her a kiss; but Mrs. Petersham —good and even affectionate—was not one to meet an impulsive girl half way, so her niece contented herself by expressing her thanks verbally; and then the two ladies proceeded, as Alphonse Kar assures us is—under every circumstance of joy or sorrow, life or death, wedding or funeral—the invariable custom of woman-kind, to discuss the toilet to be worn on the delightful occasion of Lady de Lisle's concert. For the benefit, therefore, of the fairer part of the creation, I will endeavour to the best of my ability to describe the dresses decided on.

The pale, faded-looking Mrs. Petersham, we regret to say, chose a very light grey silk, rich and handsome in itself, trimmed with beautiful white Brussels lace. Nevertheless, it gave to that lady a more than usually washed-out appearance; and the white feather she wore in her drab-coloured hair, and the pearl necklace, contrasted still more unfavourably with a complexion which had never been fresh, and was now decidedly the contrary. Muriel chose a dress of white tulle, made with three skirts, and worn over a petticoat of white glacé silk; the dress

which fitted exquisitely, was the work of a first-class French modiste, and was trimmed and looped up with sprigs of white jessamine and myrtle, the wreath and bouquet of natural flowers to match. The beautifully-formed throat and neck were without ornament; the bright brown hair, neither light nor dark, but fine, and of a natural gloss rarely seen, was arranged in plain *bandeaux, à la Grisi,* and encircled behind with the garland before described.

Even Aunt Griselda could scarcely help expressing her admiration aloud when her young charge entered her dressing-room for approval; and Dr. Petersham, smiling quite good humouredly as the bright vision burst upon him, exclaimed—

"Well, I declare, Muriel, you have grown quite a beauty; how many conquests do you intend making to-night?"

The smile and blush of gratified vanity were quickly called forth by her uncle's praise. Truth to say, the Doctor was very magnetic, and people could not help liking him in spite of his faults. As for his niece, she would have loved him, had he permitted her; but, as it was, fear had almost taken the place of affection.

During the short drive from Charles Street to Park Lane, Mrs. Petersham had time to express a kind of

tranquil astonishment that Lady de Lisle had known of Muriel's presence in town. The young lady, however, did not feel quite so surprised as her aunt; for a little bird had already whispered in her ear that it was all Gerald's doing—dear, kind Gerald, who had not altogether forgotten his old playmate. And then, woman-like, she made excuses for all his supposed misdemeanours. "Was he not an all-devoted son; and did not his mother, as was natural, take up all his time and attention: but when the Baroness leaves town, if uncle takes me to Twickenham, then we shall have some delightful walks, and rows on the river, once more, Gerald and I, and dear old Nel."

CHAPTER IX.

BARONESS DE LISLE'S CONCERT.

THE BARONESS DE LISLE was superior to that vulgar vice of fashionable life, fine ladyism. Secure in her unquestioned and unquestionable position in society, she could well afford to leave all paltry arts and petty stratagems to minor satellites of paler light and lesser orbit. Therefore when Lady de Lisle, Baroness in her own right, threw open the princely salons of her noble mansion in Park Lane, she feared not to invite even those who had never trod the charmed floor of Almacks, or been admitted to the yet more exclusive reunions of the Marchioness of Uptown, or the Countess of Alderney. Neither did this truly noble lady dispense and measure out her smiles according to the rank or rent-roll of each guest.

Those esteemed worthy of an invitation to Lisle House, were likewise certain of a gracious reception

from its aristocratic and graceful mistress; so, when pompous Dr. Petersham entered—his pale, timid wife on his arm, robed in silk of a shade so lustreless as to appear like soiled white, imparting to that lady a decidedly faded appearance—the Baroness, advancing a step, held out a beautiful and exquisitely gloved hand, declaring herself charmed to make Mrs. Petersham's acquaintance.

"And this young lady," she added, with her most bewitching smile, "is the niece of whose beauty I have heard so much?" And her eye rested for one moment kindly on the lovely fresh young face, now crimsoned with pleasure, while Muriel, struck with the rare beauty and still youthful appearance of Sir Bouverie's mother, could scarcely withdraw her eyes from the queenly woman, already surrounded by a host of new arrivals.

They passed on slowly, for the crowd was dense, through a perfect garden of flowers, a cloud of perfume, a blaze of light. Dazzled, bewildered, intoxicated, Muriel moved on as in a dream of fairyland. She had scarcely time to wonder why she had not yet seen the young heir of the house. She says in her heart, "This is delicious—happy those who can go to parties every night!"

Meanwhile the Doctor fortunately discovered two vacant seats, in which after placing his fair charges, he stands behind them, and proceeds to point out the lions of the evening.

"See, Griselda, that pale-browed thoughtful-looking man, with dark slightly-grizzled locks—that is Gladstone. That delicate-looking tall man, with aquiline features and full light beard and whiskers, is LYTTON BULWER, the greatest novelist of his day, and one of England's most distinguished gentlemen.

"Indeed uncle!" exclaims Muriel, in rather too audible a tone—for english ladies in public never raise the voice above a low murmur—"how glad I am to see him!"

"Hush, child," says Aunt Griselda; "speak lower."

"Ah! Taylor, how are you?"

"That, my dear," whispers Mrs. Petersham to her niece, as the Doctor converses with a tall and very fine-looking man standing near, "is the author of 'Philip Van Artevelde.'"

"Ah, that beautiful poem!" exclaims Muriel, turning her expressive eyes, now sparkling with delight, upon the poet, who returns the eloquent glance with interest. Then to her aunt—"Lady

de Lisle must be very clever to have such clever friends."

Mrs. Petersham smiled.

"Talent, my dear, is not exempt from weakness, and literary men are but too apt to court the great."

"Still, Aunty," persisted Muriel, "there may be an aristocracy of talent as great, if not greater, than that of birth."

Aunt Griselda made no reply, for just then the Doctor touched her arm, and bade her observe a tall elegant-looking man, dressed in the most perfect taste, whose pale intellectual countenance and brow, pregnant with thought, bespoke him the possessor of a mind of no common order.

"That," said Dr. Petersham, "is one of America's most gifted writers, whether in poetry or prose—N. P. Willis. He is just now the petted idol of fashionable coteries—the lion of the season. By the way, Griselda, remind me to get you his 'Pencillings by the Way' from Hookham's, to-morrow—you will be charmed with it."

"Aunty," asks Muriel, "who is that little stout woman in pink silk, the colour of her cheeks?"

"That is Lady Walsingham. She has just married, at forty-five, her fourth husband. She was

originally a nobody, but matrimony, for her, has been quite a ladder to promotion—a ladder with four steps, my dear, and she ranks now as one of *la crème de la crème.*"

"Why, Aunty, it appears to me almost disgusting to marry four times."

"So must it to every well regulated mind, my dear, but society is to some criminally lenient, while others are made the scape-goats for their own and their neighbours' delinquencies; but you are yet too young and inexperienced to comprehend these things."

Aunt Griselda was apt to moralise, and might have continued, had not Sir Bouverie de Lisle just then advanced with a very handsome, but rather stout young lady on his arm.

"The Princess Mary of Cambridge," was the subdued murmur; "how well she looks!" "A truly regal lady!" "See, the Duchess, her mother, precedes her, on the arm of the Duke of Cambridge." "Now, I suppose, the concert will commence."

All turn their eyes to the piano, where Costa stands, looking conceited and supercilious, evidently awaiting with intense anxiety a recognition from royalty. The signal given, the maestro takes his seat at the instrument, the singers rise, music in

hand, and the business of the evening commences with a Terzetto; two or three vocal pieces follow, and then comes *the* sensation of the evening. Standing in the background, is seen a young man of medium height, slight, fair, and graceful, whose appearance is remarkable for the absence of all pretension. To him the conductor cedes his place at the instrument, with every mark of obsequious homage—for this young man, so unassuming, so prepossessing, so gentlemanlike, is none other than THALBERG, the *désespoir des pianistes*—the piano-king of world-wide celebrity. A movement is rather felt than heard throughout the aristocratic assemblage, as of those who settle themselves finally, in order to give their undivided attention to that which is to follow.

Unlike most performers, who usually begin with a noisy and voluble prelude, Thalberg merely strikes a few chords and then pauses, while the audience draw the long breath of rapt attention. When the piece commences, at once you acknowledge the sense of calm power which pervades the playing of the master, and which some may have mistaken for coldness; you, however, if you have an ear, are at once charmed by the delicious mellowness, united with refined delicacy of the touch, the classic purity of

rhythm, the exquisite finish of the most elaborate phrases, the pearliness of the rapid passages, the perfection of the *pianissimo*. Then you listen to the air, *sang* as few, if any, vocalists, dare hope to equal, at first simply, then repeated amid a perfect shower of diamonds, sparkling as they fall, till at the climax the melody is once more heard as the peal of an organ, soaring high above the clash and clang, and with all the thrilling effect of, a mighty orchestra; then, as if the overflow and fervour of genius could no longer be controlled, the soul of the great master swells the chords with passionate pathos; like an avalanche, suddenly sweeping a peaceful valley; like a volcano sleeping beneath a snow drift, so has all outward seeming of impassibility given way, and cheek and brow flush, and a half smile, as of triumph, wreathes the firm lip, as a torrent—a Niagara —of full and elaborate harmonies, transport the hearer out of himself. Words are indeed powerless to pourtray effects which, previous to the advent of the "master of masters," the great originator of the modern school of pianistes, were even undreamed of. Suffice it to say that Thalberg alone, of all executants —and we have heard most of them—the fiery Litzil, the sparkling Doehler, Herz and Lubech, Goltschalk,

the creole pianist, and though last, not least, the graceful and original Schuloff—all but the immortal Chopin, have we heard, and yet Thalberg alone realises our *beau ideal,* and that, because his playing is simply and actually PERFECTION. Nor does this great artiste take any mean rank as composer, while in his arrangement of a melody he is *unique,* though in this respect he has many—too many, imitators. For us, then, we repeat — earth holds but one THALBERG! So thought, or, rather, so felt, our tender little heroine, as she sat, eye, ear, heart, sense, drinking in all, intoxicated with the heavenly sounds. Long, long, had she striven to restrain her overwrought feelings, or at least to conceal her emotion, but in vain. Fairly mastered at last by the flood of harmony inflowing on her soul, poor Muriel was most unfashionably overcome; tears streamed down her cheeks, and it was with difficulty she could repress the hysterical sobs which rose to her throat. Ah! what a triumph for genius are the tears of beauty! what are the smiles which she bestows on all the world compared to the sighs and sobs which came from the very inmost of her being? And he, could he have known of the emotion his thrilling tones had awakened, and were he indeed all worthy

as he seemed, how proud, how touched he would have been; but instead of such result, the applause of the gay and fashionable throng fell perhaps hollow on his ear, while she, was awakened from romance to reality by the chiding and shocked accents of Aunt Griselda, whose musical ear was by no means susceptible.

"Oh, Muriel, how *can* you be so foolish about nothing but a pianoforte performance!"

And then the Doctor—

"For heaven's sake, child, command yourself," as he placed his stout person so as for the moment totally to eclipse his niece.

Not, however, did he so completely conceal the fragile and graceful little figure, as to prevent poor Muriel from having unwittingly attracted the attention of a well-dressed, and rather elegant-looking foreigner standing near. This gentleman had, in evident admiration, either of our heroine's beauty or sensibility, perseveringly gazed at her with a pair of cold, soulless orbs, of that frosty blue whose glance almost sends a chill through you. Their owner looked as if he would give worlds to win one glance from those dark eyes, now flashing with intense excitement, now softening beneath a more tender emo-

tion, now blinded with tears; but Thalberg still played, and to attract her notice was hopeless.

The great pianist had, however, at last quitted the instrument, and it being the close of the first part of the concert, a general movement was made towards the room, where ices and other light refreshments were served to the company.

CHAPTER X.

STILL IN PARK LANE.

But Muriel, like a child aroused too soon, is once more in dream-land, spell-bound by the sweet reminiscences which yet linger in her soul; this time, however, she awakes to sober reality with a start, for Sir Bouverie passes, bowing slightly to her, and on his arm the beautiful equestrian, in whose company she had once before seen him in Hyde Park. She is so dazzling in her proud beauty, that all eyes follow her—one of those exquisite types of saxon loveliness, only to be found in perfection among the daughters of our aristocracy. Tall and straight as a young cedar, a form at once slight and voluptuous, features faultless—one may say almost to a fault—eyes of heavenly blue, and such rich hair, such a swan-like throat, such graceful shoulders—no wonder that a buzz of admiration follows her every movement.

"The Lady Mildred St. Aubyn," the Duke of Glengarrow's second daughter, "not yet seventeen," the belle of the season—"what a handsome couple!" "it will be a very suitable match," is echoed around. "Sir Bouverie de Lisle, who on his mother's death will be immensely wealthy, is heir to the title of Baron also, which descends in the female line; a suitable age, too. Sir Bouverie is not quite twenty-one."

"Lucky dog!" said a cornet of the Royal Horse Guards Blue, twirling his moustache, and putting on an extra amount of Hyde Park drawl; "she's a-out and a-out—the most killing gaal in town."

"Well, that's a matter of opinion," replied an equerry to the Duke of Cambridge, to whom this observation was addressed; "for myself, I prefer her sister, Lady Guinevere; less regular features, perhaps, but decidedly more expression. See, there she comes leaning on the arm of young Glentworth, her brother; she is very lovely, by Jove!" and the speaker turned in the direction in which the beauty's sister was approaching.

"Yes!" thought Muriel, "he is right, Lady Mildred is the type of the material; her sister of the spiritual—what a sweet, pure, transparent countenance—what clear, pellucid eyes. Sweet Lady

Guinevere, if your sister is born to be admired, you surely are formed to be loved."

"Come, Muriel, we are going."

"Going already, uncle?" said the poor girl in a voice of disappointment; "and the second part of the concert is to come, and Thalberg plays again, and"—she would have added, had she dared—"I have not spoken one word to Gerald yet;" but Doctor Petersham was obdurate—he thought of his night's rest already broken, and of his niece's folly, as he termed her show of sensibility. Aunt Griselda, too, had a holy dread of a repetition of the previous scene. So both were consequently inexorable.

Muriel ate an ice without tasting it, for the tears were ready to start to her eyes; then cloaked her aunt and herself, sighing as if her heart would break. Just as she was stepping into the carriage, after her aunt, the Doctor having started to walk home, she dropped her bouquet, when a gentleman stepped forward and picked it up, presenting it to her with a low bow, but not before he had managed to abstract a sprig of jessamine, which he pressed to his lips, just as Muriel bowed in token of thanks for the civility.

Had our heroine been less pre-occupied, she

would have recognised this stranger as the elegant-looking man who had remained near her the whole evening; as it was, and being rather unsophisticated, she merely thought she had dropped the little flower, and that the polite stranger was inhaling its fragrance; but she did not see, or she might have guessed differently, that the gentleman had instantly sprung into a Hansom, and had given orders to the driver "to follow that carriage as quick as possible, and by no means to lose sight of it."

Muriel, meanwhile, safe in the gloom of the night, let fall a few rebellious tears—she felt it hard to be taken away so soon from such delight—such lovely music—from the only chance she had had too for a year, of seeing and speaking with her friend Gerald. She envied all the young girls there, who had kind, good-natured parents—especially she wished herself again and again, in the place of Lady Mildred St. Aubyn.

"Happy girl!" she thought, "she has everything her heart can desire—kind friends, fortune, position, and wondrous beauty—it is too much for anyone, and if after all, she does marry Gerald—why, if that will not be a heaven upon earth, I don't know what will! However I too looked very well to-night, even uncle

observed it, and I saw it in the glass; but what is the use, no one saw me—no one observed me in the crowd—because instead of being the daughter of a duke I am only the niece of a doctor; and even if I lived in London it would be different; but, to be condemned to the country, where one sees no one, all one's life, no wonder I am unhappy."

Plunged in these sad reflections, our heroine was not sorry when the carriage drew up to the door in Charles Street, when, bidding her aunt a hasty good night, she retired to the solitude of her chamber, and lying down in her cosy little bed, she indulged in all the luxury of grief, and at length sobbed herself to sleep.

Meanwhile Sir Bouverie, having fed his beautiful charge with ice and strawberries, and just one half-glass of champagne, offered her his arm to escort her back to the concert-room.

"Oh, how I wish we were going to danth!" lisped the pretty pouting lips; "don't you, Thir Bouverie?"

"Indeed, yes, Lady Mildred, if I might be honoured by so fair a hand."

"Of courth I thould danth with you. I do *tho* love the polka and the galop."

"Lady Mildred, will you allow me to lead you to your seat? I see Thalberg is again at the piano, and silence is the order of the day."

"Oh! the handthome, elegant creature, what a pity he ith only a muthic mathter."

"I have heard," rejoined Sir Bouverie, "that Thalberg is of a very high family in Vienna."

"Oh, how charming!" exclaimed the lady, "but what a funny creature to like to practith tho much. I do tho dithlike practithing."

Somewhat weary of the beauty's prattle Gerald at length persuaded her to be seated, and as she was instantly surrounded with admirers, he felt that he might now leave her, and go in search of Muriel, with whom he longed to have a few moments' conversation.

His eye glanced over the concert-room, but the bright face and small classical head were nowhere to be seen. He passed through the suite of rooms into the conservatory, into the refreshment room, the picture gallery, the cloak room, but, as we know, fruitlessly. At length, with a sigh of blank disappointment Sir Gerald returned in time to hear the grand quartette from "*Mosé in Egitto*," accompanied by a chorus of amateurs. This was the finale,

and then at Lady de Lisle's desire, he escorted Lady Mildred St. Aubyn to the supper room, while Muriel now slept peacefully, and smiled in her dreams.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNT.

Dr. and Mrs. Petersham's small dinner parties were exceedingly pleasant. The society (as far as the gentlemen invited were concerned at least) was certainly excellent, consisting principally of literary men, a few celebrities in the artistic world of painting and sculpture, with occasionally a sprinkling of the younger scions of nobility—younger sons or cousins—and rarely, very rarely, some few gentlemanlike foreigners, who had come to our shores provided with good credentials, in the shape of letters of introduction.

Doctors were seldom, if ever to be seen at their fashionable brother physician's table, for the doctor looked down on the profession by which he gained his daily bread, and utterly abhorred the very idea of talking shop.

The female portion of the company was not so

recherché; it usually consisted of some two or three members of Mrs. Petersham's large family of unmarried sisters, so that if the bill of fare frequently varied, the old complaint of "*toujours perdrix*" might truthfully be applied to the feminine half of the society usually assembled at these friendly entertainments.

This time it was the turn of Miss Emma and Miss Lucy Barlow to lend their valuable assistance to the amusement of the guests, who had been invited to the house of their brother-in-law. These young ladies, though about seven or eight and twenty only, were already set in the type of old maidhood. Plain, prudish, and uninteresting, they neither sang, played, nor painted, but we believe they set up rather for literary characters, as they read the *Quarterly* and *Edinbro'*, and occasionally skimmed over the new poem, or the latest novel of the day. They were affectionate, too, in their family relations, and worshipped the doctor as much if not more, than did his own adoring wife.

Muriel did not, as may be imagined, sympathize with any of the sisterhood; in her aunt she had seen qualities that commanded her admiration and

respect, but she considered the other members of the family perfect nonentities.

The dinner party this evening was limited to eight; the host and hostess, the three young ladies, a brother of Mrs. Petersham's, the Honourable Mowbray Fitzurst, and his friend and *protegée* the Count Waldemar Costesca.

With the latter we have already made acquaintance at the Baroness de Lisle's concert. This gentleman, having, as we have seen, discovered the abode of the young lady he appeared to regard that evening with so much admiration, lost no time in finding out with whom she resided. After some trouble he was fortunate enough to get a promise from his friend, Mr. Fitzurst, that he would present him to Dr. Petersham on the first favourable opportunity.

They met, soon after, at the Athenæum, when the presentation took place, which resulted in an invitation to dinner. Fitzurst had assured the Doctor that he had met the Count at Venice, that he was of one of the noblest Venetian families, but exiled, and his immense estates confiscated for political reasons. "Wonderful musical genius, too, my dear Dr. Petersham, voice equal to Mario, sings like a martingale.

You would really do me a personal favour if you would show him a little civility."

Now the Honourable Mowbray Fitzurst knew nothing on earth about the Count's antecedents, he did, however, know that he could sing a good song, and was a famous hand at billiards and *écarte*, having managed to ease his honourable friend, at these pleasant pastimes, of various sums of money from time to time. Mr. Fitzurst, however, believed the Count's story of his family misfortunes, and shewed his sympathy by getting for him, through Sir Bouverie, a card for Lady de Lisle's concert, and now by having procured for his protegé, the much desired entrée into Dr. Petersham's family circle.

The Count Waldemar Costesca, who might have been about thirty-five, was one of those individuals who had had a narrow escape of being created splendidly handsome; at times indeed, and with certain advantages of light and distance, he really, perhaps, looked so, for his features, though large, were cast in Grecian mould, and his head if partaking of a similar defect of slightly disproportionate size, was finely shaped, and gracefully set on the classical cut throat and shoulders. The crisply curling hair and full bushy whiskers, of a pale

but not light shade of brown, contrasted well with a complexion of almost alabaster whiteness, and might have been likened to Parian marble, but for the marks here and there, shewing slight traces of the visit—years gone by—of that direful malady which the beautiful or the vain of either sex dread worse than death itself. The mouth too—worthy of the chisel of a Canova, frequently wore an expressive and sympathetic smile; but the laugh,—"Ah, there's the villainy!"—the laugh was a grimace—but then the Count rarely, if ever laughed. Perhaps, however, the greatest defect in this remarkable countenance were not only that the eye-brows and eye-lashes were scanty and very light—but that the eye itself was almost colourless, and so small, and deep set beneath the high intellectual brow as to impart to the face the blank, death-like appearance, of that of a statue. The windows of the soul were dim—and she rarely, if ever, looked from the glassy orbs, which gleamed so coldly—shedding a chill around them where they gazed. The Count was scarcely above the medium height, but his haughty bearing and graceful nonchalance of manner not only well became him, but likewise gave him an appearance of greater height than he actually possessed, and even

materially seconded his aristocratic pretensions. The figure was elegant without being well proportioned—the short members and long body of the Italian, instead of the longer limbs, the thin spare flank and well-knit frame, which have acquired for the sons of sea-girt Albion a reputation for muscular grace and manly beauty, not excelled by any—nor even equalled, except perhaps by the Albanian.

In justice to our new acquaintance we must also add, that in manners and appearance he was a finished gentleman, whose accomplishments would make him a valuable addition to any society. Muriel, who spoke French and Italian with fluency, was consigned to the charge of Count Waldemar; who, in offering his arm to his fair companion, to escort her to the dining-room, held hers, just an imperceptible degree, closer to his side than was absolutely necessary, but not so much so as to shock in the slightest degree, the delicacy of the young lady.

At dinner the conversation was general; and the Italian shewed himself conversant with music, politics, and the customary small talk of polite society. When the ladies retired, he shortly followed them, alleging as an excuse, that he preferred the music which fell from ruby lips—even to the nectar

of Olympus—and thought it highly barbarous of the Englishmen, to prefer sitting over their wine to the company of ladies. Coffee having been served and sipped, and the gentlemen having entered the drawing-room, Dr. Petersham requested the Count to give them a little music. He sat down most good naturedly to the piano, and running his finger over the keys, in a manner which proclaimed him a musician of no mean pretension, he sang in an exquisitely mellow and highly cultivated tenor voice, one of the beautiful *Canti popolari Tuscani*, of Gordigiani, then passed to a Venetian Barcarolle—soft and soothing, like the cadence of the light oar, as the silent gondolier skims over the laguna—and lastly, he carolled the most joyous and light-hearted of Neapolitan national airs; alternately grave or gay, these strains, each and all, were rendered in a manner which left nothing to be desired.

"And you, Signorina," said Count Waldemar, approaching Muriél, as soon as the bravos, and "thank you's" and "how lovely's!" of the company had subsided, "will you not favour us? I feel sure you sing."

"Why so?" said she smiling.

"Because," replied he, lowering his voice, and

speaking rapidly in Italian, "because, *cara mia*, I witnessed your emotion when Thalberg—(happy man, to have occasioned the shedding of such precious pearls)—played, at the Baroness de Lisle's concert."

"Were you there?" faltered poor Muriel, half ashamed, and blushing celestial rosy-red, as she now, for the first time, remembered the handsome stranger, who had picked up her bouquet at the carriage door.

"And secondly," pursued Costesca, enjoying her discomfiture, "because you have a singing face; and do you, may I ask, admire the great pianist personally, as much, as you evidently do, artistically, Miss Muriel?"

"I think him very handsome and *distingué*-looking," replied she.

"Well then, let me advise you, bella Signorina, not to bestow your heart upon him, for it is said he is in a consumption—or, at any rate, so delicate as to occasion grave fears for his health."

"Oh, I trust not," sighed Muriel, a shade of melancholy stealing over her features; "we cannot spare so much genius."

"Well, for your sake then—because he appears to

interest *you* so deeply—I trust it is a false report: but, Signorina, you are cheating us of our promised song—let me accompany you—will you trust yourself to me?"

"Willingly!" exclaimed she, proud and delighted, and was proceeding to choose from her portfolio the air which she thought she could sing best, when her uncle interposed with—

"Really, Count, my niece has scarcely any voice, and but little culture—you had best not sing to-night, Muriel."

The Doctor always tried to put an extinguisher on his niece, probably lest she should eclipse the sisters-in-law. This time, however, the Count insisted—so much so that the Doctor, in common politeness, was forced to yield, not, however, before he had so mesmerized the impressionable girl as to prevent her singing a note, to do herself justice. Nevertheless Count Waldemar seemed pleased with both the voice and the taste of the trembling young *débutante*, and spoke to her words of kind encouragement.

So pleasantly passed the evening, that the moments seemed to have wings. But now the banquet is over, the guests departed, and the Doctor,

and his woman-kind, sit in conclave on the departed Count.

"He is a handsome man," says the Doctor.

"Too pale," sighs Miss Lucy, surveying her brother-in-law's rather florid complexion.

"The small-pox spoils him," says Emma.

"He is very like ——," observes Mrs. Petersham, naming a well-known London music-master.

"Not the least in the world, Griselda," replies her husband, "you never *do* see a likeness correctly —but what says my niece—nothing?"

"That I am enchanted with his singing, and, with uncle's permission—as the Count tells me he intends making music his profession for the present—I should much like to take a few lessons of him."

"Oh, Muriel!" exclaimed Aunt Griselda, scandalized, "that would be quite improper."

"Oh, Muriel! how funny you are!" half shrieked the sisters from behind their fans.

"Well, well," says Uncle Petersham, taking up his bedroom candlestick, "I wish you feminines would think about retiring to the arms of Murphy; the Count's merits and demerits will keep till to-morrow."

Whereupon a general move was made, a good-night said, and the ladies sought their several chambers.

But Muriel, silly, romantic child, did not just yet pay her court to Morpheus, or Murphy, as her uncle had been pleased to name the sleepy god; seating herself at her toilet, she took an engraving from her writing-case, bought that morning, and laying it before her on the table, she proceeded to perpetrate the poetry which we ask the reader's permission to transcribe:—

"LINES SUGGESTED ON SEEING THE PORTRAIT OF THALBERG, AND HAVING HEARD THAT HE IS IN A CONSUMPTION.

"Yes—there is sadness in those deep clear eyes,
And o'er that angel brow the shade of thought
Hath passed—though mantles yet a youthful bloom
On that calm cheek. Still let me gaze upon thee,
Beautiful shadow, till the memory
Of those heart-thrilling chords awake, and shed
O'er my wrapt soul their heaven-born harmonies.
Hark! yet again those magic tones I hear,
And thronging crowds surround thee: little deem
Those gay and thoughtless ones, that 'neath the deep,
Unearthly calmness of that young, pale brow,
There lurks a fire all hidden, which consumes
The spring time of thy life; and thou dost chant,
Swan-like, thine own death dirge. Dear child of genius,
Save us the pastime of an idle hour—

They heed thee not: nor will I mourn for thee
When thou art gone. The lov'd of heaven die young—
Nor theirs the loss. Yet will I weep for aye—
From this our sphere so bright a spirit hath passed,
That a fair star is quenched where all is dark,
That in a waste, and weary wilderness
One lovely flower hath faded!"

MURIEL.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MOTHER AND SON.

The London season was now drawing fast to a close. The Queen and court had left for Osborne; the park was pronounced hot and dusty; the Opera, too, was, beginning to show, in the stalls and boxes, symptoms of the absence of its fashionable habitués, whose places were now filled, by the nobodies who usually wait the end of the season to indulge in a cheap aria from Grisi or Bosio. Indeed the ministerial whitebait dinner had actually been announced, and even our friends the Petershams had gone to their villa near Richmond, yet the Baroness de Lisle remained still in Park Lane, and Sir Bouverie was making the most of the good gifts of youth and health. Night after night found him at balls, and day after day he was invited, requested, almost forced into, a round of déjeuners, picnics,

Greenwich dinners, horticultural fêtes, boating parties, and what not.

One morning, as really tired and weary, in spite of strength and elastic spirits, he sat with his mother, languidly dawdling over a very late breakfast, she observed—

"London is now getting insupportable, Gerald, so the day after to-morrow, positively, I take my departure for Lisle Court, and your pale face, too, my son, would be the better for a little country air; do you go with me?"

"Not just yet, mother; I go first to the Petershams at Richmond."

"Indeed!" replied the Baroness, a slight accent of surprise, and the least possible shade of annoyance in her tone; "I thought you were to go to the Glengarrows, for grouse shooting."

"Really, my lady," replied her son jestingly, "you seem to have forgotten there are nearly three weeks to the 12th. Besides, you know it was always understood that when you returned to Lisle Court, I should pay the Petershams a visit."

"Very well, dearest," replied his mother; "but remember your promise to the Duchess also."

"I remember, mother; but, to say the truth, I

care little about going to Glengarrow, and only promised, with a proviso. I prefer greatly returning home to you, and then, if agreeable—I mean, if you do not dislike it—I might—that is, *you* could—ask the Petershams to pay you a visit. Mrs. Petersham is rather an invalid—so the Doctor tells me at least, —and would enjoy the quiet comfort of Lisle Court; and perhaps, too, Miss Brandon might be prevailed on to accompany her aunt—she is very fond of riding, and would enjoy our Warwickshire scenery; besides," (coaxingly), "you, dear mother, would find her an exceedingly pleasant companion."

"My son would find her still more agreeable, I fancy," replied the Baroness archly. "But I do not blame you, Gerald, for admiring her—she is a charming little girl, not actually beautiful, but bright and nice; she looks intelligent, too—might be quite a belle in some provincial place, but would never make a sensation in town. Now Lady Mildred really is perfectly lovely, and with such a thorough-bred look —to my taste better even than beauty—so sweet and so *naïve* too."

"Too much *naïveté*, mother, may approach the verge of silliness."

"Silly! not at all for her age—almost a child—

scarcely sixteen" (the Baroness chose to forget Lady Mildred was now turned of seventeen), "one may say scarcely out of the nursery; her innocent child-like ways are truly fascinating."

"Why not say child*ish*, my dear mother? the word is still more appropriate. I'll stake ten to one she still plays with her doll on the sly."

"Fie, for shame, Gerald! for libelling the petted beauty of the season, who has already had ten highly eligible offers."

"At the risk of being thought quite heretical, I must plead guilty, I fear, to the misdemeanour of admiring Lady Guinever more than her faultless, statue-like sister," said Gerald.

"Lady Guinever," replied the baroness, "may be more interesting, but she is far from being so handsome as Mildred; her nose is longer, and her mouth is a trifle on one side; besides, she is too pale, whereas her sister seems to have stolen the most delicate tints of the blush rose to stain her cheeks; and I think I never beheld lips so perfect, both in form and colour."

"Upon my word, mother, I am quite glad it is Lady Mildred, and not Lord Glentworth, of whom you are speaking in such rapture, or I should be

quite alarmed at the idea of being persecuted by a cruel stepfather."

"Lady Guinever," pursued the Baroness, without noticing her son's jesting speech, "is engaged, and the wedding will take place at Glengarrow Castle some time in the autumn."

"*Tant mieux!*" laughed Gerald; "then I may admire the young lady without risking the loss of my heart."

"My dear Gerald, you have my full and free permission to lose your heart and your head also, to a St. Aubyn, if so inclined; but at present," (observing a slight expression of annoyance steal over the countenance of her son,) "at present, dearest, you are too young to think seriously of any girl. And this I trust you will not forget in your intercourse with young ladies." The Baroness paused, and then resumed—"You have not forgotten, my love, that I desired to give up the property into your hands on your attaining your majority; but now, on more mature consideration, I think it would be wiser and better for you to see the world previous to your taking upon yourself the cares of the estate. And perhaps," added she, smiling, "to a family. What do you say of going abroad this winter?"

Now Bouverie had indeed longed to travel, and nothing but the idea of the pain which he feared even a transient separation might occasion his mother, had deterred him from proposing such a tour. The Baroness, on her side—though she dreaded to lose her son—preferred, as ever, the sacrifice of her personal feelings to his ultimate good. There was perhaps another reason also which had influenced Lady de Lisle, but at which we cannot do more than hint. On the morning preceding the departure of the Glengarrow family from town, the Duchess had called in Park Lane and stayed to luncheon with the Baroness, after which the two ladies had remained closetted together for several hours in her ladyship's boudoir.

The Duchess had then informed her friend that her son, Lord Glentworth, having planned a tour on the Continent, she was most anxious to secure him a travelling companion.

"Now, my dear Baroness, there is no young man I admire so much, or respect so highly, as I do your son. Glentworth, too, is so attached to him; could you not then spare Sir Bouverie to go with my boy for a short time?"

"When does Lord Glentworth propose starting? I suppose not till after his sister's marriage?"

"Oh! I suppose so," replied her Grace; "but Glentworth, when he *does* get a plan into his head, is not particularly fond of delay; besides, Mr. Beltravers intends taking Guinever abroad immediately after their marriage for two years or so; the fact is he is building a new house at his place—it is to be quite a sort of Vathec show place, you know, and Beltravers intends collecting all sorts of curiosities and antiquities himself, and he means to have the finest private collection of old and modern paintings and sculptures that ever were seen, or even heard of, I believe; and he naturally wishes Guinever, who is quite an artist, to choose herself, the pictures for their gallery. I tell him he will ruin himself, though he *is* a millionaire; but it is useless talking, he is obstinate, and she enchanted, so they may remain abroad even much longer than they at present intend, and if so, we shall possibly join them in Italy, with Mildred and the younger children, and then if Glentworth and your son could meet us, we should be quite a family party."

The Duchess laid a slight intentional stress on the word family; and the Baroness, whose pale cheek wore a momentary flush, replied—

"I feel sure, dear Duchess, that in no family circle

does Bouverie feel more at home than in your own; and I will add, if not too presumptuous, that it would be the proudest day of my life could I dare hope to see at his side the most beautiful and virtuous bride that ever wore veil and wreath."

Lady de Lisle's soft eyes had filled with tears as she spoke, and the Duchess, after having obtained her promise that she would do all in her power to induce her son to join the young Marquis in his projected grand tour, bid her friend an affectionate farewell, embracing her with evident emotion.

CHAPTER XIII.

MEETING.

THEY sat beneath the broad shadow of the noble old elm, which stands on the lawn before the pretty villa described in our opening chapter. Muriel, in wide straw hat, the green ribbons floating in the summer breeze, and Nelson, her close friend and inseparable companion. She is watching pensively the flowing river, glancing and glittering so gladly, mid its green and sedgy banks, changeless, eternal, thinking mayhap—if thought so sad may enter the mind of one so youthful—how that in a few short years sickness, sorrow, death, may come to her, and those still dearer than herself, while in endless murmurs shall the ever-babbling current tell its merry tale to the listening stars,—still shall its sparkling wavelet dance gaily onward to the ocean.

Nelson is seated at Muriel's feet, looking with grave and loving eyes into her abstracted face, yet

ever and anon pricking up his ears and listening as if he expected some one still dearer even than her.

"Dear old Nel," at last she said, patting his big head fondly, "you and I, I fancy, are thinking of the same person, and perhaps longing equally for his coming—no, not equally, Nel, my boy, because you know you can't speak; but I—oh! I have so much to tell him—besides, you know you were with him all the time till yesterday, while I have not seen him for so very, very long."

And then fair Muriel fell into a still deeper reverie, but this time it is certain old Father Thames had no place in her thoughts. She dreamed now a dream of the past, of the happy days they had passed together, of the old familiar talks they had had; then her thoughts flew to the concert in Park Lane, to his proud, peerless, beautiful mother, whom already Muriel worshipped as a devotee the Madonna, and then the thought of lovely Lady Mildred caused a heart-sore sigh.

"Dear Gerald, I wonder if they like each other,—if it is true what people say; does she sing or play? I wonder. And me—will he think me improved in singing. I fear he will not like those Italian airs I am learning with Costesca; I know he

dearly loves a simple ballad," and then the uncomfortable consciousness that Sir Gerald would dislike the Count, made Muriel involuntarily hope they might not meet, for great, indeed, would be the gulf between the high-born Englishman, thrice noble by birth, by education, and, still more, by innate nobleness of nature, and the foreign adventurer, whose polish was but skin-deep, and who, in the daily intercourse of social life, not unfrequently betrayed such lack of true gentleman-like feeling, as greatly to shock his fastidious pupil, even though her artist soul, when the delicious tones of that melodious voice fell upon her ear, or when they mingled with hers in some tender and passionate duo, would too gladly forget and forgive that which five minutes before had filled her with disgust. Oh, ye mothers! beware of a good-looking music-master of graceful presence, who sings with sentiment, especially if he possesses a tenor voice.

Our readers are perhaps surprised that in the house of prudish Aunt Griselda such dangerous goings on should be permitted; we must, then, endeavour to account for such exception to the general rule, by premising that the Count, clever fellow! who had seen how the land lay, had most amiably

offered his services to the Doctor, who desired to purchase a piano, not only to select for him a suitable instrument, but likewise to forego in the man of medicine's favour the percentage always deducted to a professional purchaser; the Doctor, therefore, having paid considerably less than cost price for his Collard, and, not caring either to pay Costesca for his services or to continue under an obligation to him, gave permission to his niece, while in town, to engage him for two lessons a week at one guinea each, thus giving to a beginner the price claimed by veterans in the art. The Doctor likewise invited the Count to come down to Twickenham for the same purpose once a week, frequently detaining him, a not unwilling guest, till the next morning. The Count's cue also was to act the most respectful, most despairing love for the rather antique Miss Emma, much to that virgin's secret satisfaction, and to Muriel's intense amusement.

The lessons were a great source of delight, and under the Count's really artistic tuition, Muriel improved rapidly, both in voice and style. Now, however, both Count and singing were for the moment forgotten, for Sir Bouverie had signified to Dr. Petersham his intention of coming down to spend a

week with them prior to his departure for Lisle Court.

The news was told to Aunt Griselda at dinner, and Muriel felt that she coloured she knew not wherefore, for Gerald had ever been to her so entirely a brother, that the delight occasioned by his presence had been perfectly free from emotion, and she had noted his comings and goings with entire philosophy, at least of manner.

So now she hated herself for such folly, and pressing her little hand to her heart, felt almost angry she could not for the moment, quiet its unwonted and joyful beatings. On the day so long desired, so ardently expected, Muriel therefore took a book, and, as we have seen, accompanied by her faithful friend Nel, seated herself in the prettiest and most secluded nook in the grounds to await his coming, for she felt that the meeting could not take place in the presence of Aunt Griselda.

And now Nelson, who has been pricking his ears from time to time, is at last fairly aroused to earnest attention, for the wheels of a carriage are distinctly heard coming nearer and nearer. The fly enters the gate, and Nel, yelping and bounding in true canine delight, rushes towards the house so madly as almost

to upset the centre of gravity of his young master, as he alights travelling bag in hand.

Muriel's first impulse is decidedly, to follow the dog's example, but her heart is beating too wildly, and her colour ebbs and flows like the wave in the rosy dawn, so she wisely determines to walk gently on, and meet Gerald quite coolly and calmly. But he was quick as lightning at her side.

"Miss Brandon—Muriel," and he caught both of her hands in his, "how glad, how happy I am to see you again!"

"At last!" faltered she, in a voice which plainly said, "I thought you would never come." And then they gazed on each other in silent blissful emotion. Muriel took but one look, with those eyes so tender, so full of soul, and then fixed them on the ground, but one short glance told her how handsome, how manly he had grown. The moustache dark, downy, and curling, the wavy chestnut hair, the liquid violet eyes, with lashes black as night; the already splendid development of muscle in the slight lithesome figure, the aristocratic grace of bearing. In one moment she saw all, and that one moment sufficed to change sisterly love into a feeling warmer, dearer, but not less pure and lovely. But then the thought

came back with a sharp pang, that perhaps another already dwelt in his heart,—claimed his faith,—so she crushed the tender flower ere it had time to bud. "No, he is my brother, my dearest, dearest brother, I am happy even thus."

And he, too, gazed fondly, lingeringly, feeding the hunger of the heart on that downcast, blushing face, those drooping lashes, on the pleased half-smile which lurked in the corners of those virginal lips he longed to press, but dared not; for he had thrilled to the inmost of his being as he met the speaking glance which for one sweet moment had mingled with his own. Again he took the little hand he had but now relinquished.

"Dear Muriel, and are you pleased to see me?"

"Oh so glad, so very glad."

So they sat them down to chat in the old familiar way.

"And why did you not come oftener in London to see us, Sir Bouverie?"

"I did call several times, but you were invariably out, and then London is such a sadly dissipated place; you can have no conception, Muriel, of the quantity of invitations, at least half of which, I was absolutely obliged to accept."

"Obliged, indeed," with a pout, "to neglect old friends!"

"Yes, obliged; absolutely forced, Miss Muriel, to avoid giving offence. In a certain clique, to accept civilities from some, and refuse them from others, is to make enemies, and that would never do for the leader of a party, which I intend one of these fine days to be, fair lady."

"Really," replied she wonderingly, "you surprise me! I thought you superior to such—I must call them follies,—with your pardon, Sir Bouverie."

"Call them what you please, Muriel, only don't call me Sir Bouverie. I am, and always must be Gerald to you."

"It was my aunt," laughed Muriel, slightly blushing, "who says I am now too old, and you too grand, for us to continue to act and speak as children."

"Never mind good Aunt Griselda, even though, like Minerva, she sprung, armed *cap-à-pie* from forth the head of Jove; no, for heaven's sake, let us be natural, and banish formality for one week at least. Oh! if you only knew how weary, weary I am of fashionable jargon and titled humbug, you would humour my whims a little, sweet friend."

"Indeed I will do as you wish, Gerald," she

replied, all glowing with delight, as hope and incipient love whispered "perhaps after all he prefers the simple country maiden to the haughty beauty of Park Lane." "And what a splendid party it was at your mother's; and how magnificently beautiful she is!"

"Indeed, my dear mother is the queen amid queens; but how early you left, Muriel. I hunted for you high and low in the whirl of the waltz, for we danced after supper in the conservatory, amid your sister flowers, amongst ices and champagne glasses, and even cloaks and shawls, but all in vain, the bird had flown, and even Thalberg's attractions were powerless to lure the dove from her nest."

"Indeed I begged hard to stay, but uncle and aunt were obdurate, so we left after the first part. But you did not miss us—you appeared to amuse yourself greatly."

"Pretty well," he replied, musingly. "You know I had to play host that night, and do the civil to Lady de Lisle's guests. And as the Duchess of Cambridge and Princess Mary honoured my mother with their august presence, much of my time was necessarily taken up with playing equerry in waiting to royalty. Then afterwards my mother's intimates

claimed me, so—in short, that night I was a slave."

"A willing one," thought his companion, not however daring to express her thought aloud, an incipient jealousy, which she dreaded of all things to find based on a solid foundation, sealing her lips. "He carefully avoids naming her," she mused; "it must be that he likes her, and fears, perhaps, to wound me, by showing his preference."

And instantly, thus thinking, her pride took offence, and her manner unconsciously assumed a certain coldness and constraint which seemed to astonish and even chill poor Gerald. They, however, continued to converse on general topics, till interrupted by John the footman, who came to announce —by Aunt Griselda's desire—to the young people, that luncheon was served in the dining room.

CHAPTER XIV.

PARTING.

A WEEK—a week of happiness—which would have been unalloyed (did not the thought that each blissful day brought it nearer to its close,) had now well nigh passed, and the last evening found Muriel and Gerald sitting together, after dinner, beneath the old accustomed elm tree. Dr. Petersham had, during the day, been called by telegraph to attend an aristocratic patient, who had been seized with sudden and alarming illness; Aunt Griselda, too, had gone to bed with one of her excruciating headaches, so the young people had had a long, happy, undisturbed day together: they had taken a long walk in the beautiful park, had spent two or three hours on the river, and now they were lingering away their last few precious moments as daylight waned and the sun sank down beneath the horizon, trailing after

him such golden, glorious clouds, that Muriel exclaimed,—

"See, Gerald! Can it be possible that even in Italy the sunsets can be more gorgeous?"

"I can scarcely believe they can be more so than this one," replied her companion; "but here they are rare, whereas in the sunny south (as the poets term it) these sunsets of rubies set in gold are of frequent occurrence. But I shall be better able to tell you more about it soon; for do you know, Muriel, I am going shortly to Italy?"

"Indeed!" said she, though she felt a choking sensation in the throat; "and shall you remain long?"

"One never knows when once one gets abroad, you know; but I believe my mother wishes me to remain two years or so. I am to go with Lord Glentworth, the Duke of Glengarrow's eldest and only son, and we are to visit Spain and Portugal, and the Mediterranean on either side, Greece, Constantinople, Egypt, perhaps even the Holy Land, and to finish off with Italy; that, I believe, is the present programme,—quite a Byronian tour, you perceive. I shall certainly return with turned-down collars, and a Byron tie, and perhaps a poem of one thousand cantos or so."

It was fortunate that Gerald had made such a long speech, as it had given Muriel time to recover from the emotion she had felt at such unexpected and painful intelligence. She had now, however, recovered sufficient voice and self-possession to enquire:

"And when do you leave?"

"I believe," replied he, "Glentworth waits for his sister, Lady Guinever's marriage; and very shortly after we shall start."

"How I envy you!" sighed poor Muriel; "how fortunate you are to be born a man! If I were not a helpless, dependant girl, 'an unprotected female,'" she added, with a faint attempt at a laugh, "how gladly would I, too, visit all those countries. I have lately heard so much about beautiful Italy—her climate, her galleries, her churches, and, above all, her music, that I am positively dying to go there."

"Apropos, Muriel, I was forgetting to tell you, I don't at all admire that Italian music-master of yours. Where on earth did you pick him up?"

"He was at Lady de Lisle's concert," replied Muriel, somewhat nettled, though not so much at what had been said about the Count, as at the idea that the brother of Lady Mildred St. Aubyn was to be Gerald's travelling companion.

"You met this man at my mother's? You are dreaming, Muriel mine! my mother has never, to my knowledge, admitted any professional to her house on terms of equality, with one only exception, and that is Thalberg; but then he is not only of noble extraction, but is himself a perfect gentleman, and one of the most pleasant companions in the world,—so full of wit and humour, really charming when you know him personally."

"Indeed, Gerald," persisted Muriel, "the Count Waldemar Costesca *was* at Lady de Lisle's, and was presented there by Mr. Fitzurst, who knows that he is of high family, though poor and an exile."

"Nonsense! This is one of that mad-cap, Fitzurst's, swans, who always turn out to be geese in the end; that sort of Count is of no *ac*-count at all."

"Now, you know I dislike puns, Gerald; besides, that is a despicable attempt at one—and, after all, what do you know about the Count? who, at any rate, is a gentleman — (Oh, fie, Muriel! that is not your real opinion, and you know it.)—" and he certainly sings delightfully."

"Oh, as long as he sticks to his music, and keeps

his place, I have no objection to hi m; but I certainly thought last night, when you two were singing that duett from——what was it?"—

"I Puritani," suggested the young lady.

"Well, that 'Puritani' duett,—that (you will not be affronted, Muriel?)—I thought the Count—what d'ye call'm?—was a shade more tender in his manner than I should quite like to see towards a sister, or indeed towards any young Englishwoman."

"It was all in the music," said Muriel, deprecatingly.

"Then pardon me, if I say that such music were best left to operatic singers; it can but sully the lips of a modest, pure-minded young lady."

"I know that you prefer the English style of singing," replied she; "but, I confess, I love the Italian; the words alone are music: why deprive me, then, of almost my only pleasure?"

"Not for the world would I do so; for I feel sure Miss Muriel Brandon knows well how to keep twenty Count Costesca's at a distance; but I could not leave for so long a time without one word of warning. You know how dear my old playmate has ever been and still is to me; no sister could possibly be dearer," he added, remembering in time his promise

to his mother; "therefore, I trust Muriel will not be entirely deaf to her brother's desire—shall I say, his prayer?"

The poor girl could not speak; her tears, hidden by the shades of night now closing in rapidly, were already welling from her eyes, and streaming down her cheeks; nor could she trust her voice, for she felt that sobs would have choked her utterance; so she silently placed her hand in that of Gerald's in token of assent. What was the Count, or music, or anything else to her could they displease Gerald, and cause her to lose his affection, such as it was? How she desired now to ask him, if it really was for the sake of the sister, that he was to travel with Lord Glentworth? how she wished to know the truth, at any price. Oh! how entirely had she longed to tell him every thought of her heart, to receive all his confidence in turn; and now that he was on the eve of departure, how much was still left unsaid! To-morrow, long ere this, he will be gone,—gone, for years, perhaps; and, when next we meet—if ever we do—what changes may have taken place! And fearing Gerald might observe her long silence, the young girl turned away to pat Nel, and caress him, while the hot tears rained down on his sleek head

and long curling ears. But Gerald was likewise a prey to conflicting emotions, which, from honourable motives, he, too, was endeavouring to conceal; his thoughts ran in a somewhat similar strain to those of the loved companion at his side:—"Here," he said, "I leave this young creature homeless, dependant on the caprice of relations, but yet with sufficient money, to render her a prey to some needy and designing fortune-hunter, and I dare not give her the safeguard of my love; I may not shelter the tender lamb from the biting frost; my mother says I am not yet arrived at years of discretion, that I do not know my own mind; have I not loved this little one when a boy, and has not the feeling 'grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength?' have I not found in her my beau-ideal of woman realized—all love, and tenderness, and genius, and sweet influences, and delicious womanly faults and failings, which render her

> "Not too bright or good
> For human nature's daily food,"

and place her just half a dozen steps lower than the angels; otherwise she would soar far above *me*, and not cling to me as her support, her guide, her king. Ah! sweet mother mine, you will listen to your

boy's prayer, you will not oppose our happiness!" And he turned with a bright, hopeful smile towards Muriel, whose burning tears still fell in showers upon old Nelson's neck and head, he endeavouring to console her by administering numerous licks with his large tongue on her dimpled hand.

"Come, lady fair," said Gerald, gaily, "I am quite jealous of the attention you are bestowing on that dog. Ah! Nel, you rascal, I must take you away, to-morrow, or you will be quite spoiled here."

And he chatted cheerfully on different subjects, till Muriel had sufficiently recovered her composure to say that it was getting late, and that, as Gerald was to start at six o'clock the next morning, they had better retire for the night. She promised too, faithfully, to be up and dressed, ready to pour out the coffee for him, and accompany him to the railway station.

So they parted, without actually saying the sad word, farewell, but with a long, lingering, fond pressure of the hand, and the lightest of brotherly kisses on the fair girlish brow.

And Muriel sought her pillow, but not to sleep—she had no rest that night, for, whenever forgetfulness came for a moment, she saw the beauteous face and

golden tresses of the lovely but dreaded Lady Mildred, ever between her and Gerald, to prevent his approach, or to hide him from her sight. But Gerald slept soundly until day dawn, rocked in the cradle of hope, wrapped in the elysium of yet untasted happiness.

CHAPTER XV.

A PETITION.

In the antique oratory situate in the west wing of the noble mansion of the de Lisles, its honoured mistress sat once more at her tapestry frame; the autumn winds sobbed and sighed through the almost barren branches, spreading over the broad park lands a carpet of withered leaves. But the moaning of the winds and the gloom of the November day seemed well to accord with the present mood of the lady, whose fair face was clouded with sadness, while from time to time the large tear-drop which had gathered in the full grey eye, fell slowly and silently from the silken lashes, though still she continued to ply the needle with diligence.

"Mother, dearest mother mine," said Gerald, tenderly bending down, and kissing the fairy fingers, "let me remain with you. I would sacrifice any

pleasure rather than cause you one moment's uneasiness."

"No, my son, you must forgive a woman's weakness; you have my wish, nay, my command, to go. You must not mind a few natural tears," she added, as she endeavoured to dry the eyes which still overflowed.

"But, mother, you will feel so lonely. Christmas is the season we have never yet been parted."

"True, Gerald, and I am much surprised Lord Glentworth does not postpone his journey for a couple of months."

"Oh! Glentworth is such a determined fellow, and so fond of having his own plans carried out, that there is no hope of making him listen to reason; but mother, why this excessive need that I should go now, or even at all, with Glentworth?"

"My dear boy, this is childish and unlike yourself; when the Duchess and I in London made all these prospective arrangements, and I proposed the tour to you, you then made no objection, but, on the contrary, appeared greatly to like the idea."

"Well, mother, so I am delighted to go abroad and see new countries, but yet I don't particularly

care about bear-leading or being led about like a tame lapdog by your pet, Lord Glentworth."

"Really, Gerald, this is mere caprice; what objection can you have to a travelling companion, who can move about surrounded by every luxury, with horses, carriages, first-rate letters, and a clever physician, too, in his suite; all this, too, on equal terms: indeed, my son, this time you are unreasonable."

"May be so, my lady;" then in a lower tone, as cheek and brow flushed warmly, "Mother, why not wait and share my first experiences of travel with a dearer companion—a wife?"

Lady de Lisle glanced quickly and keenly at the half-averted face of her son, half hoping to find he had spoken in jest; then smiling fondly—

"Dearest, I think you have chosen an odd time to jest, on the eve of a long, long absence, when, too, you know the pain I suffer at parting from you."

But Gerald, taking her hand, replied seriously—"Believe me, kindest and best of mothers, I never was further in my life from a jest; listen, then! oh, listen favourably, for on your answer may depend the happiness of my life." Then observing the look of anxiety, almost of terror, which overspread the lady's expressive features, the young man sank on one

knee, and tenderly kissing the beautiful hand still clasped in his own, he exclaimed, as if reading her thoughts: "Never fear, mother mine, that your son could ever choose one unworthy to be named daughter, even by the Baroness de Lisle."

"I know it, my son," she said faintly, clinging to the young firm hand as if to gather strength to hear what most she dreaded; "proceed, Gerald, tell me all about this new fancy of yours."

"No fancy, mother, believe me, but a serious attachment," he murmured softly, "which will last me my life."

"Yes," she said as to herself, "these boys and girls ever say so, ever think so, but time, that skilful unraveller of the heart's mysteries, tells another tale; and pray is the young lady aware of your—" folly she would have added but checked the impulse, and substituted "sentiments?" looking all the time painfully anxious for a reply.

Sir Gerald, rising, drew himself up to his full height, looking every inch a de Lisle.

"That question appears to be needless, from Lady de Lisle, when addressed to her son, you cannot have forgotten, mother, that you have my promise that the young lady should know nothing whatever, unsanc-

tioned by yourself, of my attachment. I need then scarcely repeat that till you accord to me permission to speak, I consider myself bound in honour to be silent."

"As soon as I could lisp, mother, you taught me to respect the word of a de Lisle, how, then, can you doubt?"

Nobly, manfully, did the youth utter these words, and the Baroness felt her cheek flush, as she gazed into the clear, calm blue of those truthful eyes; but a slight feeling of shame at having mistrusted him somewhat qualified the tears of happiness and motherly pride which now shone in her eyes. But she mastered the emotion, and merely said—

"Forgive me, my son—I had almost forgotten. My fears made me for one moment, not misjudge you, but tremble a little. Forgive——"

"I have nothing to forgive; but you, my best! —will you consent to my wishes?"

"I can form no opinion till I know who the lady is."

"Ah, mother, she is young, and tender, and good, and true; not, perhaps, a bright and brilliant beauty, taking the senses captive at first sight, but each moment, as you view her in the sweet household intercourse of daily life, you perceive in her new

charms, new attractions. If you tell her a tale which interests, cheek and lips glow with a brighter rose; if anything occurs to provoke her mirth, the silvery laugh, and the smiles which dimple her cheek, remind you of the Queen of the Loves and Graces; and then, mother, what a world of mystery, of innocence, of purity, dwells in the depths of the clear eyes; and so accomplished, too—such a delightful companion; and oh, remember she has never known a mother's love, a father's care—an orphan, homeless, alone in the wide, wide world,—my poor, poor little Muriel!"

The moisture stood on the long dark lashes, as the young man, pale with emotion, hoping, trembling, hung on the words which seemed never to come.

The Baroness had covered her face with her hands; she now raised her eyes, and met the tender, imploring gaze of her son; but her lips had taken a rigid, firm expression, as if carved from Parian marble. She spoke, though cheek and brow had blanched, in a voice coldly calm and decided—

"Gerald, you must forget this youthful fancy—you have mistaken your feelings. I can never consent to this mésalliance."

"Oh! darling mother! see her—only see sweet

Muriel, and you will yourself be the first to urge me to secure the treasure."

"No, Bouverie, no; I could never forget I am a de Lisle, and a de Lisle must not mate but with his equal—the eagle may not pair with the sparrow!"

As the lady spoke, her haughty beauty proclaimed her the daughter of a long line of ancestry—the curl of the chiselled lip, the "beautiful disdain" of the nostril, the gracefully-proud pose of the head, the dignified bearing, the faultless features—now rigid as stone; all combined to show that every tender feeling—even that in her most strongly-developed maternal affection—had momentarily given place to pride of birth and lineage.

Sir Gerald, under other circumstances, might have admired, even sympathized, with this feeling; but now, for the first time, he thought his mother stern, unreasonable, even.

"But," he expostulated; "are not beauty, virtue, talent, sufficient—what, without these, is pure blood?"

"My son has the right to look for all these good gifts, and find them among the highest and loveliest of the land."

"And my happiness, mother, will you sacrifice that to a chimera?"

"A chimera," said Lady de Lisle, sadly, "for which your mother sacrificed, at seventeen, youth, beauty, love, happiness, all—all," she murmured; her eyes now filling with a softer emotion, and a faint flush tinging her pale cheek. "Yes, dear Gerald, I once loved, as you love, with all the strength of my nature, one who, though of gentle blood, was still no fitting mate for a daughter of de Lisle; but I wedded a cousin, poor, unloved—and, oh! still worse!—well, no matter,—because I had resolved that none but a de Lisle should ever be called master within these halls of my forefathers. How I prayed that my son might not resemble his father; and when he came—my pride, my consolation—how I garnered up my soul in him—my beautiful—my own!" and the proud woman, who so rarely gave way to feeling, flung herself on his bosom in a passion of tears;—"Gerald, my son, my only one, will you do less for your mother than she has done for you? will you pierce the heart which has pillowed your baby head, for the curled ringlet of a schoolgirl?"

Deeply affected, the young man tenderly pressed the weeping lady to his breast, and then placing her on a seat, spoke to her a few words of sympathy

and filial love. He then turned and walked towards the window, for a gloom had gathered in his eyes of deepest blue, and the pearly dew-drop stood on the silken lashes. He was, after all, but a boy, with smooth and downy cheek, and a woman's tenderness of heart. It was a first grief, and the effort to suppress its outward evidence caused the strong chest to heave, and the throat to contract spasmodically. But Gerald was cast in heroic mould, and he would not give way. One more struggle, and he forced down the hysteric ball, and bade the fluttering heart beat in measured cadence. Victory! the tears are brushed from the transparent lids, and he turned once more to his mother, who, now pale, and to outward appearance calm, awaited his reply in silence.

"My own mother!" the words broke at first falteringly from the trembling lips, but gathered strength as the firm will exerted its power; "the favour you have asked should be granted, did it cost me my life's blood, for I can never repay the debt of love and gratitude I owe you. Take, then, my solemn promise;—never will your son wed one unworthy to be the mother of the de Lisles; never will he be the means of bringing disrepute on a time-honoured and unblemished name, of which he

is now the sole representative. But to this promise Bouverie de Lisle must add a qualification—a resolution, firmly based as the foundation of these massive walls. Without my mother's full and free consent, I will never wed my love, but that *unreasonably* withheld, I will never, so help me, Heaven! call another woman bride, until, (and he smiled proudly, almost scornfully) until my Muriel has proved herself unworthy—as she is now most worthy, to be the mistress of my home and hearth!"

Thus saying, Sir Bouverie quitted the room, and sought with rapid step the solitude of the broad park lands, which he paced till long after the shades of night had cast their wonted gloom over the landscape.

But from the fair face of the Baroness, who had watched the doors close over the noble form of her idolized boy, the shadow had departed.

"Poor child! Poor young heart!" she sighed; 'twill be a sharp struggle, but a short one. We will trust to time to dissipate this schoolboy fancy. Never, never, must the young eaglet mate, but with his fellow!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW CHARACTER.

WHEREFORE is it that almost every misfortune which has fallen to the lot of woman, may be traced to the machinations of some member of her own sex? Does a tale of scandal get wind,—is some hitherto unblemished wife or mother suspected of the slightest indiscretion, who is ever the first to point at her the finger of scorn?—a woman. The husband is never in fault, of course not, in the eyes of the ladies, he is a man, and may act as he pleases—but she—Oh! shame. Or if a young maiden, forced from her home by household unhappiness, foolishly, madly, leaves the paternal roof with one who passionately loves her, and has promised to make her his own before God and man, how her *dear* friends speak of her as they sip their tea, kindly expressing the sneering hope, that the man may take compassion upon her and marry her after all! If a woman is jilted by her affianced lover, be sure the

amiable creatures will find some excuse for him, and take occasion to fling a stone at her, such as, "she was such a flirt, it really does not surprise me;" or, "poor Miss Such-an-one has not after all hooked her fish; she is wearing the willow I hear." But over and above all, in case of separation between a married pair, let the husband be a drunkard, a gambler, let him have the temper of a fiend, be a noted libertine, do these good gifts injure him with the fair sex? Oh! far from it, the libertine is indeed doubly welcome in the ball-room and the boudoir; but the lady—be she innocent, pure, virtuous, as she may—is rarely received into society by her own sex *on terms of equality* (unless remarkably ugly or decidedly old), in which case she is usually pardoned for not being able to live with her husband; and, perhaps, even considered to merit the crown of martyrdom.

But let us now turn to the reverse of the medal, let the fault be the woman's, and tell me which of her sex (however sinful), would not be ready and willing to cast a stone at her? Far be it from us to blame the virtuous matron for black-balling such frail fair ones, but why not visit an erring husband's sins with like retribution?

Lady Hazlitt, widow of some knight of the aldermanic fraternity, unknown to fame, had been left with a small family and a munificent jointure; the former it had been Dr. Petersham's business and pleasure safely to pilot through the perils of measles, whooping cough, scarletina, and divers other ills which infantine "flesh is heir to." Her Ladyship thought a great deal of the Doctor, and to shew her gratitude, had (after the death of the alderman, which calamity, it was said, the physician's skill had long postponed,) worked for him a purse, in which was woven, in letters of gold, the somewhat equivocal though trite sentiment, "that such services could only be repaid with gold." The buxom widow then, after filling the purse with these precious coins, presented it to the Doctor at Christmas, with her own fair hands. He took the offering, nothing loth, but smiling furtively at the vulgar idea of the parvenue, that gold was ever the highest reward of merit; and in future the widow of the defunct alderman was received in Charles Street on an intimate footing, though, sooth to say, Mrs. Petersham found her but an uncongenial spirit.

Lady Hazlitt was by no means an ill-natured woman, she would not have willingly or wantonly

wronged any soul breathing, but she largely inherited the failing which has fallen to the share of the majority of the sex, she dearly loved gossip, and was not particular as to the exact truth or falsehood of the tales she carried from house to house. She was also, like many other small-minded women, very curious about her neighbours' business.

This lady lived at Ealing, in a very pretty but rather cockney place of her own, and when the time drew near that Muriel should return to the country, the widow, who, as we inferred, really liked to do a good-natured action when it cost her nothing, begged hard, very hard for a month, or fortnight, even a week, of the young girl's society. Her brother Captain Young, she said, was coming to her, and she intended during his stay to give a *fête champétre*, and *déjeúner dansante*, under tents on the lawn; and Edmund, who was quartered at Hampton Court, would get permission for the band of his regiment to attend, and would besides bring the Colonel and all the officers; and she should have fire-works too, and her dear Mrs. Petersham must come over with the Doctor, and must spare Muriel to her for a few days—she would be such a help—she really could not do without her.

Mrs. Petersham finding no objection to her niece spending the last month prior to her attaining the age fixed for her majority, eighteen, with Lady Hazlitt, consented, and Muriel returned with her hostess. Perhaps her ladyship had taken the notion into her head, that a very charming young girl, with five hundred a-year of her own in consols, would not be a bad match for her brother; but if such was her idea, she soon observed, with displeasure, that the gallant officer's attentions were but ill received.

A few days—even hours—spent in the society of Captain Edmund Young, soon showed the handsome but coarse-looking young officer in his true light. His extreme devotion to the pleasures of the table, the gusto with which he smacked his lips as he tasted the excellent old port and topaz sherry of the defunct alderman, proclaimed him at once a gourmand, and the animation with which he talked of the different qualities of calipash and calipee, and the all-absorbing interest with which he spoke of the middle slice of the haunch, cut thick and juicy, with its due proportion of fat, and just done to a turn, utterly disgusted our somewhat superfine heroine, and caused her to contrast most unfavourably this gro-

velling animal nature, not only with the intellectual, chivalrous, thorough-bred Sir Bouverie, but with the outwardly polished, and certainly graceful and talented Costesca. But this visit, if not actually enjoyable, was at least gay and pleasant, for rich Lady Hazlitt, with all her many faults, was most truly and hospitably an Englishwoman. Muriel's stay at Ealing, however trifling as were its incidents and wholly apart from her inner life, was still destined to affect all her future, so little do we know how events may turn out for good or ill, so foolish are we to consider the most trifling circumstance of daily life of small moment.

In an evil hour, then, for our heroine, as she sat in the bow window of the little morning room, finishing a sketch, Lady Hazlitt entered, and taking up a dress she was embroidering for her youngest hope, declared her intention of having a cosy *tête-à-tête* that morning with her young guest. In the course of conversation, the hostess began to speak of the Petershams, and by dint of questioning and cross-questioning, induced the young girl to do, what no one who has ever been admitted into the privilege and confidence of a home, should do, to speak of her uncle and aunt's private affairs, and thoughtlessly

betray the trifling family failings and secrets of which she had, as inmate of their house, acquired a knowledge. Harmless in themselves, these little incidents might easily, in the hands of a woman uneducated and unprincipled, occasion very serious mischief. We say *unprincipled* advisedly, for are not all who do not exercise self-control virtually devoid of principle? The matron and the maiden laughed, as people are wont to laugh at the follies of their dear absent friends, but with this difference, Muriel's heart smote her, Lady Hazlitt's did not. Muriel, after a fashion, loved her aunt and uncle, while her companion loved herself, only. The girl had spoken with the imprudence of the child, innocent of guile, scarcely comprehending the drift of the questions put to her. The worldly woman, on the contrary, knew well what she meant, for she was besides one of those who love to find motes in a neighbour's eye, which she never failed to magnify into beams. A tale of scandal was to her like a glass of champagne, a burst of sunlight, a refreshing breeze, poor grovelling creature!—and yet she was not bad at heart, but only selfish, talkative, and altogether of a low order of mind. But the suite is yet to be told.

We have elsewhere hinted that Dr. Petersham was not always in the most amiable of moods, and that relations, dependants, and all acquaintance except the *élite* of Belgravia suffered more or less frequently from the keen lash of his satire. On the grand day of her *déjeûner*, Lady Hazlitt's poor silly head was well nigh turned, because she had succeeded in catching a real live duchess to show at her *fête champétre;* true, the Duchess had once been an actress, but "*qu' importe,*" she was all the same "her Grace;" so her Ladyship went about talking to every guest about "Her Grace the Duchess of Loughborough," till unhappily she stumbled on Dr. Petersham, whose arm she seized, and kept him prisoner for an hour, expatiating all the while on the subject most near and dear to her foolish worldly heart. The Doctor bore all this with philosophy, till he had finished half a cold chicken, and a couple of glasses of champagne, when having in vain tried to get rid of his hostess, or, at least, to change the subject so wearisome to him, he lost all patience, and launched out in his most biting vein of satire on the subject of vulgarity and parvenues. Her Ladyship, furious, not only abused the Doctor himself roundly, but actually repeated all that poor Muriel had said, with

infinite exaggeration and embellishment. Dr. Petersham, wounded to the quick, left his companion summarily, making no reply, but instantly sought out his wife, desiring her to accompany him to their carriage without delay. On their drive home the angry man communicated all that had passed to Aunt Griselda, adding, "We cannot cut that —— woman, her tongue is too dangerous, you must even cajole her, Griselda; but as for that heartless, ungrateful girl, she shall never again put foot in my house."

"But, dear," suggested his wife, "perhaps Lady Hazlitt made the worst of it."

"She is capable of any atrocity," returned her husband; "but that does not lessen Muriel's fault; and mind, Griselda, I repeat it, that girl shall never again darken our doors."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HEIRESS.

It is needless here to transcribe the painful letter received by our heroine two days after Lady Hazlitt's *fête*. Poor Muriel, indeed, made a most humble and penitent reply, which remained unnoticed, while Lady Hazlitt laughed at her taking this nonsense so much to heart.

"You had better marry Edmund, my dear, and then you may be presented at court, and have the right of being taken in to dinner before your aunt—a doctor's wife, indeed. I wonder you fret, Muriel, when you might marry a cavalry officer."

But Muriel did not intend to marry the captain, and was besides much annoyed with Lady Hazlitt, so she only waited at Ealing till put in possession of the interest of her sixteen thousand pounds consols, the principal of which would not be hers till one-

and-twenty, and then returned immediately to Mornington, where it had been arranged that she was to reside for the annual consideration of two hundred pounds sterling, paid quarterly.

It was with a heavy, almost hopeless heart, that poor Muriel received the welcome of the curate and his wife, and suffered the caresses of her half dozen noisy and not over clean and tidy cousins. Tea, thick bread and butter, and eggs were served, but the girl's heart was too full to eat, so hastily swallowing a cup of tea, she begged her aunt's permission to retire and unpack.

Seated in her own pretty cosy little room, her books on the shelves, her bird singing his welcome, our young heroine did what many of us who are older, and ought to be wiser are apt to do, she persistently turned her eyes from the blessings which God had given her, health, youth, beauty, talent, independence, and, above all, hope—which never deserts us, and is for ever whispering the probability of better days—and dwelt on the dark side of her destiny.

That evening, and for many a long week and month, did she give way to vain and unsatisfied

yearnings for the unattainable—she turned all into bitterness.

"What does it profit," she would say repiningly, "that I am pretty, that I have intellect, that I sing and play, who is there here, who can understand me, or that I should ever care to please? Ah! why was I ever suffered to go to London, to know what enjoyments are the lot of others, and then be for ever banished from all that would make life bearable. I almost wish I had accepted that disgusting Captain Young; I should then at least have been able to go to the opera, and hear exquisite music. That in itself would be an intense delight, but the penalty to pay would have been too great. No, I never could be the wife of a man I could not love, and besides, to be Lady Hazlitt's sister, after her treacherous conduct, — better even as it is. But that house is now shut to me, the same as Uncle Petersham's. Ah! what have I done to be so persecuted? And dear Gerald—but I dare not think of him—it would make me too wretched. I wonder whether he cares about me." And she flushed up —cheek, brow, and neck — with unbidden joy. "Let me think seriously. No, the chances are he likes me only as a sister—that Lady Mildred is so

divinely beautiful; and I have heard Aunt Griselda say that the marriage was arranged when they were children; besides, even if Gerald is not engaged to her, that is no reason why he should marry poor me—he so handsome, so grand, so rich, and so admired. And he is gone away, too, for three long years, and by that time I shall be an old maid, and he will have seen all those beautiful Italian ladies, with their flashing dark eyes and ebon hair, about whom I have read so much—no, I may be very vain and silly, but I am not quite so foolish as to indulge in such mad imaginings."

Having thus negatived all that the golden-haired syren Hope had suggested, poor Muriel would endeavour, as before, to find consolation in her books, her piano, her talent for authorship. Here for a time, she would wander in the realms of romance, and, forgetful of selfish sorrows, open her mind to the light from the spheres of the great departed; or her dimpled fingers would wander over the ivory keys till once more, in memory, she heard the "thrilling chords" of Thalberg—her beau ideal—or the silver notes of Grisi la diva, still beautiful and regal, and white-armed, as Juno herself. At such times Muriel was happy—enveloped in an at-

mosphere of refinement—forgetful of surroundings —unjarred by the screams and shouts of the children—unvexed even by the common-place conversation of the few neighbours, or the narrow-minded sectarian cant of the clergy who visited at the house; —so true it is that the mind makes or mars its own happiness; that the inner life is the true life; the inner or spiritual man the true sentient being.

And does not each thing, too, possess an inner life, only to be discerned by him who has the corresponding life in himself? The tones of music are mere sounds to the outward ear, but how do its chords of passion affect the spiritual sense? So, too, does the painter place outlines, colours, shadows, on the canvas, but the spiritual eye alone can discern the true beauty of the picture,—the inner life,—within the mere mechanism. Nature, too, while she smiles alike on all her children, to the poet alone speaks in words that burn; and thus, does the voice of God make itself heard in the innermost of the soul,—but we hear Him not, we heed Him not, till we feel, in the spiritual heart, the fond sick yearning, the thirst after the fount of all true beauty, and life, and goodness, "as the hart panteth after the water-brooks."

But Muriel, whose inner eye and ear was open to all of earth that is divine and fair, was still closed to that which is far higher; the voice of her Father in heaven fell unheeded on her spiritual ear; she had seen so much inconsistency, so much selfishness, even dishonesty, amongst professing Christians, that she considered the children of this world, were nearer the right way. Like many, very many, she had been taught theoretically, that religion consisted in going to church twice of a Sunday, taking a class at the Sabbath-school, attending an occasional prayer-meeting, collecting a few pence for the missionaries, giving alms to the poor, and avoiding worldly amusements. Practically she felt this religion to be nothing more than lip service; she knew old things not wanted were given away to the poor, or a little money easily spared out of the superfluities of the better classes, while abuse of the neighbour, tale-bearing, and the love and greed of gain, were indulged in *ad libitum* by the elders in the church; while the younger women, who would have been shocked and horrified at the bare idea of attending a ball or an opera, had no objection to an unlimited amount of finery and flirtation, at a missionary meeting, or charitable bazaar, and that

though these sainted sisters would not hear of the profane amusement of dancing, for a moment, Muriel was well aware they would play at "Hunt the Slipper," and "Kiss in the Ring," or warble amorous ditties as their admirers hung tenderly over the piano, till she—little heathen!—began to believe there was some truth in the old adage, "The greater the sinner, the greater the saint."

There were many petty annoyances, too, to which our unfortunate heiress was subject, harder to bear even than greater trials; for the pebbles in our path weary us and make us footsore far more than the rocks, which it only requires a bold effort to surmount! The Curate's salary, with a house rent free, was just one hundred per annum; his wife had brought him another hundred, and Muriel's two hundred made up an income which, with economy, could be made to cover expenses, especially as Easter offerings and incidental fees came in occasionally, to swell the amount considerably. The sum paid by Muriel was very handsome for the advantages it purchased; but neither Aunt Sophy nor her husband were satisfied. It appeared to them hard that a young girl should have to spend on herself alone, a larger sum than they could count upon for the support of

themselves and a family of six children; and the frequent drain on their niece's purse in the shape of loans, which were never intended to be repaid; at the end of the year left her almost penniless. In vain she resolved, and re-resolved to burst her fetters; her aunt would want a few pounds to pay a bill long due, or Alfred must have a new suit, or Sophy's illness had occasioned *such* a long doctor's bill,—"Do, dear, lend me ten pounds, or twenty pounds, you will not miss it;" or, "My dear Muriel, would you like to go for a week to the sea-side?"—"Yes, Aunt Sophy, I think it would be a pleasant change."—"Well, then, you must please advance fifty pounds towards the expenses; because, you know, we cannot afford such treats, and we only go for your sake!" So in the end our poor heiress was usually obliged to pay the entire expenses of the family, or she would have never ceased to hear insinuations as to her stinginess and want of generosity, till she began most sincerely to wish that she had been born without that filthy lucre, which hitherto had only served to make her a prey to the covetous and dishonest. Though naturally generous, and never more delighted than when giving to others, and thus making them happy, Muriel hated imposition, and could not see

why she should be expected to spend all her small income on the poor relations who offered her, a roof to shelter her, and diet of the plainest kind, it is true, but certainly not that for which her heart so fondly yearned—a loving, happy, and refined home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHADOWS.

Yet did the hope never entirely forsake her, that Uncle Petersham might yet relent, and invite her, as usual, to Charles Street, in the spring. As the merry month of May approached, the torture of intense expectation, daily disappointed, became intolerable; a fever was on her spirits, and the poor girl became seriously, if not dangerously ill. Each morning, as she descended to breakfast, her cheek flushed, her eye became lustrous with renewed hope, as she anxiously watched the letters her Uncle Alston took one by one slowly from the bag, and each day her faint enquiry, "Are there none for me, uncle?" was answered in the negative, and the long lashes would droop on the now pallid cheek; and Muriel would hastily swallow a cup of tea, and, complaining of a headache, request permission to retire to her room. At last, in very despair, she

got to wish that anything might come to her address—a bill, a circular, even bad news—anything to break the dull monotony of her life, for "quiet to quick bosoms is," indeed, "a hell." But vain her hopes; each day she was doomed to retire to the solitude of her apartment, with a still heavier heart, a hope yet more faint.

"They have all forgotten me," she would moan; "no one cares for me—none remembers that I am even in the land of the living. Oh! that I were dead—dead and laid beneath the cool green grass, in the quiet church yard. Oh! why was I born!" And thinking thus sadly, and we must add, wrongly, she daily wasted away, and became fearfully thin—the beautiful fresh rose in her cheek was now replaced by the hectic of painful feverish excitement—so that it was thought necessary to call in the village apothecary.

The Medico, after gravely feeling the patient's pulse, and looking at her tongue, pronounced the case to be the effect of a too sudden change of season.

"When spring first comes in," he said, "we always expect a host of ills. We have already on our list two cases of malignant scarlet fever, one typhus, three chicken pox, and half-a-dozen bron-

chitis. But you, my dear young lady, are for the present but slightly indisposed. A few pills, and a draught or two, will soon set all to rights. You've no headache, Miss?"

"No," replied the patient languidly.

"No cough, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Any spitting of blood, or nightly perspirations?"

"No, sir."

"Sleep well?"

"Not very."

"How's the appetite?"

"I never feel hungry."

"Well," said the man of pills—a wag in his small way—"if the appetite fails a little, I see the *drinkititite's* good—ha, ha, ha!" pointing to various potions of toast and water, lemonade, and barley water, standing on a table near. "Never mind me, my dear young lady—as my good woman always says, 'the Doctor must have his joke.' But, as we said before—nothing serious—a little tonic might be highly beneficial, in addition to the other medicines we shall send." Then turning to Mrs. Alston, who stood by the invalid's sofa—"Stomach, madam, all stomach—taken together (as we before stated) with the season

—would have been nothing in the winter, but spring and autumn, Mrs. Alston, are good for our profession. However, we have here no alarming symptoms whatever."

So the oracle departed, sending shortly after to the victim of his skill, or rather want of skill, divers nauseous mixtures, which she swallowed uncomplainingly, and which certainly did no good, if even they did not produce a contrary effect.

At length the young girl resolved that she would write to her Aunt Griselda, who she knew to be kind-hearted, in order to express once more her deep sorrow for the past, and at the same time to pray that Uncle and Aunt Petersham would, in token of forgiveness, permit her to pay them her usual visit in town, adding in a postscript what had been far better left unsaid, namely, that she would be only too happy to be permitted to contribute her mite to the housekeeping. Poor child! she had found her few hundreds so omnipotent at Mornington, that she quite forgot that in Charles Street her whole fortune would count but as a drop in the ocean.

This time the answer came almost by return of post—a positive hopeless refusal, couched, however, in kind terms—from Aunt Griselda, in which the

writer stated, that she deeply regretted her inability to have her niece with them this spring, as her husband remained firm in his previous determination. She, nevertheless, trusted that Muriel would bear her disappointment bravely, and endeavour to make herself happy in the country. She reminded her that her sphere of duty lay where Providence had placed her, and where her contribution to the common expenses must be of the greatest benefit to Aunt Sophy and her family; adding, that the best thing Muriel could do, would be to marry some respectable man, and have a home of her own, which Aunt Griselda felt to be the truest happiness. In conclusion, she begged to add, that her husband had been seriously offended by Muriel's proposal to pay; and such a want of delicacy had only confirmed him in his determination never again to receive his niece into his house.

She, poor child, drowned in tears of bitter disappointment, now felt that she was indeed alone in the world. She might, perhaps, have taken a serious malady—have died, and thus put an end to our book—had not an unforeseen incident occurred, which gave an entirely new direction to the current of her thoughts and feelings.

One morning as, listless and languid, the patient lay in her pretty tent bed, with its snow-white curtains, her cousin Sophy, a child of about eleven, entered with the tray, on which was placed one cup of tea, and the thinnest and most delicate slice of dry toast, her usual breakfast of late. The young girl motioned her away, with a pettish and impatient gesture.

"I do not wish any breakfast, Sophy. I prefer waiting till dinner."

"And don't you wish for a letter either, Cousin Muriel?" said the girl playfully, snatching up the missive, and pretending to run off with it.

"Letter—what letter?" exclaimed Muriel, roused at last from her apathy; "give it me, you naughty child, directly I say;" and the invalid actually darted out of bed, and flew down the passage after the laughing delinquent, calling out, "Sophy, Sophy! give it me quick, I tell you!" her mind all the while occupied in futile guesses as to who her correspondent might be—she had so few, a letter was quite an event.

"Perhaps, after all, Uncle Petersham has relented—or Gerald may have written. Oh! I know now—it is from Jennie Leslie, my school friend; she

has not written for three months, and owes me a letter."

"No, it is not from Jennie," put in Sophy; "because she always has 'Jane' on the seal, and this has a coat of arms and a crown."

Muriel's impatience had now reached fever-heat.

"Give it me, Miss, this instant! or I will tell your papa, you bad girl!"

But Sophy, impervious to threats, was a true chip of the old block, so she sold the letter to her cousin for a shilling. Had she asked a sovereign, she would have got it, so anxious had our heroine become to secure her treasure. Once, however, fairly in her possession, she spent a long time endeavouring to recognize the handwriting from the address; but this threw no light on the subject, beyond that it was written in a hand bold, but at the same time, fine and delicate, and that the turn of the g's, d's, and b's proclaimed it to be the character of a foreigner, rather than of an Englishman or woman, for the writing might have been of either gender. The next thing (and which of us have not been guilty of a similar folly?) was to turn the letter, and earnestly contemplate its seal, a very grand one—a coat of arms and a coronet.

At last Sophy, losing all patience, exclaimed—

"Do, for goodness sake, Cousin Muriel, open the letter; what's the good of cogitating over the outside for an hour—do take and open it at once."

"True, Sophy," said her cousin abstractedly; and, tearing open the envelope, she read in the finest and most copperplate of hands, the words, "*Pregialissima Signorina*" (most priceless young lady), the usual Italian formal commencement: and then turning, before perusing the letter hastily to the end, she read the signature, but that we shall see in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LETTER.

THE letter, which we shall take the liberty of translating for the benefit of our readers, ran thus :—

"MOST PRICELESS YOUNG LADY,

"Pardon the liberty I take in writing to you; but having called on your most illustrious aunt the Signora Petersham, I have learned from her that which has afflicted me profoundly. It is that her young and charming niece has no intention this season, of enlightening with the brightness of her presence this black and smoky city of London. I therefore could not resist writing one line, to ask, in grace, if the Signorina is not likely to deviate from her cruel determination of letting her beautiful voice remain uncultivated in the country, where the nightingales will certainly die of envy when they

hear her warblings. In fine, will the most noble Signorina forgive my boldness, and, without daring to hope she will deign a reply, permit me to sign myself—

"Her most humble, and

"Most obliged servant,

"WALDEMAR, Count Costesca."

This letter shone upon the darkness of the young girl's soul, as a sunbeam in a prison. It whispered of hope, however vague and indistinct, that there was a friend to whom she could look in any emergency. She was not now totally alone in the world; not quite forgotten, nor uncared for. True the writer was but a common acquaintance, and not exactly a favourite with her; she even doubted whether she would answer his letter, working herself up to a high pitch of proud indignation. What business had Costesca to write to her at all? It was a breach of etiquette, a liberty which she ought to, and did resent: probably, however, the Count only wrote because he regretted her as a pupil, not merely for pecuniary reasons, but for her voice and talent: still he might have sent her a message through her Aunt Griselda.

"No, I certainly shall take no notice of the letter, for I am sure Gerald would disapprove."

And thus deciding, she would go and practise the songs and duetts she had learned with Costesca. She would in imagination hear over again his rich mellow voice; and, as she sang, the desire would grow stronger and stronger to write to him, if only to hear from him all the operatic and artistic news of the season. Besides, the only compliments which flatter a woman of refinement, are those which are understood rather than expressed; thus when two persons meet, and the one is capable of comprehending all that is inferred by the respectful homage of the other, then the situation cannot but be full of charm at least, if not of peril.

Costesca was a clever fellow, and though he could neither understand nor appreciate the higher qualities of mind and feeling in Muriel, he quickly understood that she was not a girl to be won by the common arts of pleasing in vogue in the world, while she, for her part, felt certainly flattered, and occasionally, perhaps, almost touched by the silent worship of one who, to all appearance, was her devoted slave. Perhaps, however, our heroine might still have listened to the dictates of prudence, had

things continued to flow on smoothly at the curacy.

We have previously thrown out hints as to the incessant demands made by the whole family on the purse of the young heiress, and now, like the old woman in the story who always came to the same lady to ask charity, giving it as her reason that "she had always been so very kind to her," so was it with Aunt Sophy; the more she got out of her victim, the more she expected to get, till weary and sick to death, and feeling that her money was virtually not her own, Muriel conceived the rash idea, not only of writing to Costesca, but of making him the confidant of her troubles, always provided that all other means she intended to try first should fail. First and foremost then she wrote to Lady Hazlitt, asking if she could not recommend her to some respectable family in town, where she might find a home, and at the same time pursue her studies in music and singing.

Her ladyship did not reply for some time; and when she did, it was entirely to discountenance Muriel's project, offering also the advice gratis, that she should remain in the country, and not think of coming to London till she could do so under the

protection of a husband. Lady Hazlitt ended her epistle by heralding the news with a flourish of trumpets that her dear brother Edmund was about to lead to the hymeneal altar a young lady of family and fortune, third cousin, by marriage, of a peer of the realm, whose only fault was, that she limped slightly, and was just a trifle, marked with the small pox, &c., &c.

To Jennie Leslie then, Muriel next addressed herself, but Jennie, who lived at Tunbridge-Wells, declared with much sorrow and regret, that she could not help her friend in any way, for her mamma had said, it would be most improper in Muriel to come to London alone, and so Jennie entreated her with tears in her eyes, and a blot on the paper where one had fallen, to give up the idea, "or mamma will stop our correspondence, my darling girl, I fear for ever."

In so great a strait where should she turn. Ah! how willingly would she have clung to Gerald's opinion, consulted Gerald's wishes, confided in his superior judgment; but Gerald, alas! was far away, she knew not where; perhaps engaged, on the eve of marriage. Why should she always think of Gerald? He had evidently forgotten her, or he

would have written, if not to her, to some member of the family. Ah! if she could have even a glimmer of hope, that Gerald, more dearly loved than ever, was still free to be to her even as a brother; she would wait for years, bear any trial, purchase such happiness with any present pain; but if things were as she feared, if to indulge hope were madness, then why delay? If the blessings of domestic life were to be for ever denied her, why then she would seize the cup of pleasure and drain it to the dregs.

The decision was born of many a sleepless night, and nurtured in tears. The act meditated was the first clandestine transaction of her life, and it pained and weighed on a nature eminently truthful and candid. But the temptation was too strong. A civil and polite letter was penned to Count Costesca, commencing with a thousand apologies for having left his flattering epistle so long without a reply, and begging to inform him that she had decided on coming to town for a month or so with her maid—a respectable middle-aged person, capable of acting as *chaperone*, and that she was compelled to beg M. the Count Costesca to get her a quiet lodging in as private a situation as possible, for a few nights, till her aunt, or other friends, would be able to receive

her. The letter written, Muriel walked two miles, in order to post it herself, which she did with a trembling hand, and a beating heart. The answer did not tarry, but when at breakfast she took it from her uncle, her changing colour, and nervous, hurried manner, would have occasioned suspicion in any people less concentrated on self than the curate and his wife. Only Sophy saw, and exclaimed—

"Oh, Muriel! another letter with a crown! I should like to know who it is from."

Her cousin could scarcely force a smile, much less a reply, as she pocketed the epistle which, she felt, must exert such a powerful influence over her destiny for good or ill.

It is not necessary to transcribe verbatim, another of the Count's specimen letters; suffice it, therefore, to say, that it not only abounded in respectful transports, and expressions of slavish devotion, but it contained news which gladdened the heart of our poor little heroine—timid and bashful in her boldness, and still half inclined to draw back and remain in her seclusion; for it spoke of having already engaged the drawing-room floor, consisting of a sitting-room and two bed-rooms, in a highly respectable house, the mistress of whom was known to Costesca, and

would do everything in her power to make the Signorina, his pupil, and her duenna, as comfortable as possible for the moderate sum of three guineas a week, cooking and attendance included.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES.

"ANY unpleasant news, Griselda?" said Dr. Petersham, looking over the newspaper at his wife, whose pallid face looked whiter than usual, though her throat had flushed with a red scar, the customary effect of emotion with her.

"Sad news, indeed, dear Richard," replied Mrs. Petersham, handing a letter just received to her husband. "Our unhappy niece——"

"Good heavens! run away! What on earth does the woman mean?" meaning his sister, Mrs. Alston, whose letter he held in his hand; "run away, and with whom, pray? That girl will be the ruin of us all. I always told you so, Griselda. Thank God it did not happen in my house! I wash my hands of it!"

"Stay, dear," put in the mild Griselda; "let us hope it is not so bad as we fear. Sophy Alston evidently knows nothing about the poor misguided girl.

You know she is rather inclined to be original, and in fact it is more than probable she may even now be back at Mornington."

"Possible, but certainly not probable, my dear. Muriel is a true Petersham, and inherits all the strong-headedness—and, I may add, wrong-headedness, of the family. She has, to make the best of it, got some foolish idea in her head, which she is determined at all costs to carry out. But here" (as the footman brought in a letter on a silver salver) "is a letter from herself, which may throw some light on the matter. Read it aloud, Griselda, if you please."

The lady did as requested, and read as follows:—

"My dear Aunt,

"My health and spirits have of late been so bad, that I felt it absolutely necessary to change the air and scene. I have therefore come to town for a few weeks, and have taken lodgings in Argyle Street, in the house of a person who I have since discovered was, before her marriage, head nurse at Lady de Lisle's. I have, of course, brought my maid, who, you know, is old and respectable, with me, as *chaperone*; so I trust you and uncle will not disapprove

of my remaining in London during the season, principally for the advantage of masters."

It will however be observed, she never named Costesca.

"Lady de Lisle's maid!" exclaimed the Doctor; "was there ever anything so unlucky? It will be all over the country, and perhaps in the *Morning Post*—'*Escapade* of a young lady;' besides, what on earth is to be done with the girl after the season is over? The Alstons will not have her back, for Sophy says she will be afraid of the example to her children"—here the Doctor forgot himself, and swore a very big oath, which we shall leave to the imagination of our readers, who, no doubt, feel disposed to exclaim with poor, frightened Mrs. Petersham—"Oh! Richard, don't, I beg." "I'll tell you what, Griselda," pursued her husband, paying no attention to his wife's interjections; "you can take the carriage (I will send it home for you, and walk), and go to that headstrong girl, and tell her from me, that I, and all her relations, will disown her, if she persists in her folly of remaining in town alone. Insist on her returning to the Alstons at once. (I will raise their salary, as an inducement to them to receive her—the girl can afford to pay more.) Get John

to put her into a cab, and see her to the railway; and, for Heaven's sake, let's make an end of such nonsense."

"Yes, but dear, supposing"—the Doctor looked unutterable rage, nevertheless, Griselda persisted—"supposing, after all, *she will not go?*"

"I suppose nothing of the kind; she will—she shall—she must go!—enough—I'm sick of the subject, and Lord Riversdale is waiting for me. Now, pray, attend to my instructions."

Poor Aunt Griselda could eat no lunch that day; and she sat in her faded pink bonnet, her drab silk dress, and black scarf, waiting an hour for the Doctor's carriage, which at last came. So, with a heavy heart, its mistress entered, and gave orders to the footman where to drive. The loud rat-tat-tat brought the dirty servant of all work to the door, and all the lodgers to the windows including our young truant, whose heart beat with violence as she recognised her uncle's carriage. Happily it contained only her quiet aunt, a very great relief to poor Muriel, who was nerving herself for a scene. Advancing to meet her visitor, she offered, as usual, to embrace her, but Mrs. Petersham considering it her duty to show displeasure, drew back, and seated

herself on the sofa, motioning her niece to a chair opposite. Here she decidedly made a false move, for the open-hearted girl felt chilled at once, and strengthened in her resolution to take her own way.

"Your uncle and myself," began her present mentor, in a constrained voice, "are deeply pained and shocked at the step you have taken, Muriel, and he has sent me to beg and entreat you to hear reason. You are young, very young, child, and at your age it is out of the question your living alone in London. You must then, your uncle insists, return to your relations in the country, and that at once."

"I admit aunt," replied Muriel, "this is not exactly the proper place for me; but neither is it fair to condemn me to the solitude and wretchedness of Aunt Alston's house. Let me come to you as I have always hitherto done, and you will in future have no reason to complain of me."

"My dear Muriel, you are aware that your uncle is displeased with you, first for things which need not now be mentioned, and now, for what he justly terms a mad foolish escapade. He would not hear of your coming to us at present, but later, next year, perhaps, when he has had time to forget, I

will then try to persuade him to invite you; only go home now, and try to please him, and we will hope all may yet come right."

Muriel remained silent a few moments, weighing the pros and cons of the affair, willing to be influenced by her gentle aunt, unwilling so soon to return to her banishment. "If I *do* return, aunty, will you promise to make all right with uncle?"

Aunt Griselda sighed and coloured. "I will do what I can, Muriel, but—but—I fear my influence is not exactly omnipotent with my husband."

"Well then, aunt, what you require is scarcely fair; if I am to go back to purgatory"—she smiled—"and after all not be any the nearer paradise for the sacrifice! Why, then, I must decide on remaining here."

"Oh! Muriel, you are not surely serious."

"Never more so in my life, my dear aunt."

"Oh! what shall I say to your uncle—how go home? Oh! Muriel, Muriel!—so young, so unprotected, what will become of you?" and poor Aunt Griselda actually wrung her hands in despair.

The young girl was really affected at seeing so much emotion displayed, by one so habitually calm and passionless. She passed her arm round the

slight figure of her aunt, and laying her head on her bosom, gave vent to her overcharged feelings, murmuring softly—"Only trust me, dearest aunt, trust your poor little niece; she only wants not to be quite wretched; indeed, indeed, she will be very, very prudent and good—only trust her."

The good Griselda returned her niece's embrace kindly, even fondly, and rose to depart, when both ladies were startled by a gentle tap at the door of the apartment.

"Come in," said Muriel, in her soft voice, thinking it was her maid, when who should enter, unhappily for all parties, but the very person who, just then, was farthest from the thoughts of either lady—the Count Waldemar Costesca.

Crimson with shame, because certain of the misconstruction her aunt would put upon this most unfortunate *rencontre*, Muriel could neither frame an excuse, nor offer any satisfactory explanation to account for the Count's presence in her apartment, unannounced too, as if he had every right to enter when he pleased. She cast one timid imploring glance at her aunt, but that lady drawing herself up proudly and coldly, cast a withering look at her trembling niece, and exclaiming—

"Oh! Muriel, Muriel, this is too—too shocking!" swept out of the room and the house, shaking off, as it were, the pollution of its very dust from her virtuous feet and spotless garments.

CHAPTER XXI.

SCANDAL.

"Lor, bless me, and who would have thought of seeing *you* here, all hocus-pocus, as one may say, my dear Mrs. Jackson? and when *did* you come up? and is the family in town?"

The preceding speech was uttered by the landlady of No. 12, Argyll Street, as our old acquaintance the housekeeper at Lisle Court was unexpectedly ushered, by the servant of all work, into the little dingy back parlour, where its mistress usually sipped her cup of tea, and ate her round of buttered toast daily at five p.m.

"Why, to say the truth, my dear Mrs. Peachum," said Mrs. Jackson, untying her bonnet-strings, after carefully placing her shawl on a chair, "I am come to ask for a cup of your nice tea; for I only came up last evening on business, to my daughter Susan's marriage—very good match—clerk in a lawyer's

office—Smashum and Takeall—quite a large firm—very nice young man—two hundred a-year, with perquisites—married this very day, and gone to Gravesend for the honeymoon; but bless your heart, I'm keeping you from your tea, and that nice toast is getting cold."

So saying, the good lady settled herself comfortably in an arm chair opposite her friend and quandum fellow-servant, who busied herself "on hospitable thoughts intent" in toasting another round, adding also another spoonful or so of Souchong to the tea-leaves already nearly drained.

"And is my Lady not coming to town this season? and what news of young Sir Bouverie, bless him?"

"Her Ladyship," replied Mrs. Jackson, "remains this summer at Lisle Court, our young master being still abroad."

"And where is the Baronet now, Mrs. Jackson?"

"Last time her Ladyship heard, I believe Lord Glentworth and young Sir Bouverie were a climbing of the Pirramuds, I think they call 'um, and they wasn't coming home for a year or so."

"And how does my Lady bear the young Baronet's absence? poor dear!"

"My lady is well, and in good spirits; the Duchess of Glengarrow and Lady Mildred spent a few days at our house on their way to London, and a beautifuller, sweeter young lady I never set eyes on—and I'll tell you a secret"—looking round as if the walls had ears, and lowering her voice—"Mark my words, Mrs. Peachum, for I know it for certain, Lady Mildred St. Aubyn will one day be, Lady Mildred de Lisle of Lisle Court."

"Truth, and I'm glad of it," replied her friend; "the more so as I once thought our young master, bless his sweet face, looked beneath him like."

Mrs. Jackson looking her enquiries,

Mrs. Peachum proceeded—"Yes, I did hear talk of how Sir Bouverie had seen a young lady to his taste; but I knows what I know, and that's neither here nor there, and I'm not agoing to speak agin my own connexion."

Mrs. Jackson, a martyr to curiosity, assured her hostess again and again that she was the most discreet of women, and famous for keeping secrets—in short, a sort of freemason in petticoats; but for some time in vain. Mrs. Peachum continued to make inuendoes, but not a satisfactory word could her guest get out of her. At length rising, she told her

friend that she must go, as she had a few purchases to make, previous to returning on the following day to Lisle Court. Mrs. Peachum declared she should not go "just without one little teaspoonful, my dear, only one out of this bottle, just to keep the cold night air out of the stomach."

The little teaspoonful became a large tablespoonful, or more, and the two ladies gradually became still more friendly and confidential—as they sipped the contents of their tumblers—than they had over their tea-tray.

"Well then, Mrs. Jackson, I *will* make a confidence, and ask the advice of a very old—I may say of my oldest friend." Then lowering her voice to a whisper full of mystery—"There is a certain young lady—a first floor, you know, my dear, three guineas a week, and paid every Monday mornin, a purtier nor a quieter young lady you never did come across, a rare singing bird too, but (and here she became almost inaudible, while her visitor stretched out her chin to take in every word) but more's the pity, poor dear; I fear all is not quite above-board between her and a certain forring Count as comes here pretty nigh every day, either mornins or evenins, to teach her singing; not that she, poor lamb, is so

much to blame, I take it, but I have heerd as how the Count don't bear the best of characters—and then she is unpertected like, I scarcely like to give her warnin—and yet the 'spectability of my house you know, my dear, I shall have to do it. What do you say, Mrs. Jackson, dear?"

"You have not mentioned who the young lady is, Mrs. Peachum."

"Aye, that's the greatest secret of all—her aunt came to see her once since she has been here, in the Doctor's carriage, footman and all, quite 'spectable; and then that e'er forring man came in, and Madam leaves all in a fluster, and has not crossed the door since."

"Why, la! Mrs. Peachum, you don't mean to say as how Miss What's-her-name, the Doctor's purty niece as come to my Lady's party, would so demean herself?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Jackson, but I do though; for my lodger would long since have had a week's warnin, had it not been, Miss Muriel Brandon."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Jackson; and worse and worse you know, dear, as how there was once some talk of our dear Master Gerald—I beg pardon,

Sir Bouverie—having fancied her—leastways, such was the talk; and oh! Mrs. Jackson, dear, what an escape!"

"Providential," said her guest, much shocked; "the nasty hussey—and my Lady so proud and particlar like."

"Ah, but the upshot is, my dear woman, what'll I do?"

"Why turn the creature out, bag and baggage, in course, Mrs. Peachum; I'd have no such goings on, in a respectable house—first floor indeed!"

"Oh! but I feel so sorry for the poor young thing, Mrs. Jackson; and my Maggie, too, you remember what pretty blue eyes she had, would, had she lived, have been just Miss Muriel's age." And the kind-hearted, motherly woman put the corner of her apron to her eyes.

"Now don't take on so, dear," said her guest, softened; "perhaps, after all, the forrin gent only comes to give her music lessons—and then Mrs. Petersham having been here, makes it respectable like."

"Yes, but," murmured good Mrs. Peachum between her stifled sobs, "the upshot is that her aunt went off in a terrible tantrum, sweeping away

her skirts as if the house was not fit for the sole of her foot."

"Well, dear, don't fret about it and make yourself ill, that's my advice; and as for Missey, if she does not know how to behave herself in respectable folks' houses, why I should give her a bit of my mind, and turn her out."

So the two women kissed, and bid each other good-bye—the one in a sea of indecision whether she ought to give warning or not to her young lodger; the other fully determined in her own mind in a fit of virtuous indignation, and for the honour of the noble family whom she served, to take the earliest opportunity of informing her Ladyship of the current scandal now affecting the fair fame of the young lady whose crime it now became, to have ever dared to please even for a moment the taste or fancy of the young heir of the time-honoured house of de Lisle.

END OF PART FIRST.

PART II.

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE BANKS OF THE ARNO.

From the land of cloudy climes and foggy skies, from that great city whose dingy houses, with their small windows and doors hermetically closed, suggest irresistibly to the stranger the idea of a prison rather than of a luxurious home, that city in whose tortuous and never-ending streets he at once feels that he will certainly lose his way, as surely as he is fated to be eclipsed, extinguished, annihilated, amid its crowds of living souls: from that metropolis, where fashion, wealth, position hold their court, and the incessant occupation of the little, is alternately to envy and toady the great; where next door neighbours not only do not "love each other," but actually remain utter and entire strangers for half a century; where the haunts of penury, disease, and crime are within a very short distance (though carefully hidden in some back alley) from the mansions of the silken

children of luxury—aye, from the very palace of royalty itself. From London, rich, majestic, heartless, where five hundred pasteboards of titled names bear a higher value in fashionable coteries, than one true friend of flesh and blood; from wealthy London, so grave and respectable in its selfishness, so different but scarcely, to the thoughtful christian mind, less terrible to contemplate, than frivolous, flighty, depraved, unprincipled Paris: from London, the course of our tale now guides us, a not unwilling wanderer, to climes where nature at least smiles serenely, and humanity, if still very far from perfection, is at least more child-like in its simplicity, more warm and generous in its affections. To that fair city whose very name is a perfume, Florence, the city of flowers, we must transport our readers, informing them that an interval of more than three years has elapsed since young Sir Bouverie de Lisle first started on his travels with his friend the Marquis of Glentworth. They have just arrived from the East, and have taken the whole first floor at one of the finest hotels in the city. Lord Glentworth is tall, slight, and delicate-looking, with reddish hair and whiskers, pulled out and attenuated on either cheek to their full length; he is neither remarkable

for beauty nor talent; manner cold, timidly haughty, indolently aristocratic, and very short-sighted. Sir Bouverie, on the contrary, whom two years have transformed from youth to noble, glorious manhood, is pre-eminently handsome, both in form and feature. The tall figure, square-built shoulders, muscular arms, lithe and graceful limbs, are moulded in the very perfection of manly beauty, while the expression of indomitable will on the chiselled lip, and the indented rather than dimpled chin, the lofty disdain of all that is base and ignoble, shewn in the narrow, open nostril, united to an expression of tender thoughtfulness, which never left those violet orbs when in repose; in all these good gifts we are prepared to read, as in a book, the romance of more than one female existence. We ask ourselves, musing, how have the dark-eyed Andalusian girls, with forms so undulating and voluptuous, been able to resist a glance from beneath those long lashes black as night? The Moorish beauty, too, has she not beheld in the young Englishman her ideal of true christian knighthood? while the maidens of Athens, or of the Greek Islands, must, softly sighing, have owned to one another, that for one look of his love they would e'en, like Sappho

of old, tempt the pellucid depths of the blue Ægean.

But our noble Gerald was no Phaon, no betrayer of confiding innocence, no Don Juan, but a good, honest, true-hearted Englishman, respecting the sex for the sake of one of its brightest ornaments,—one reverenced most of all, whose tenderness, holy, pure, and true, had commenced with his first breath; and more constant, if less passionate, than other affections, would still for ever be his, undiminished, changeless, unchangeable—his mother,—deeply revered, devotedly loved. For her dear sake had Gerald, ever in his intercourse with the sex, proved himself the very flower of chivalry; for her had woman ever remained to him as a thing divine.

He too happily, possessed another safeguard; there was yet one other in whom for him was concentrated all feminine fascination, one image enshrined in his heart of hearts, to whom all homage, all fealty had been vowed. True, she so infinitely dear and precious to him, had not as yet been approved by his mother, his queen, but he hoped and sweetly trusted, that time and patience would unite those beloved ones; that he should be the link between two sister souls so well suited to each other. But he had had

no tidings of Muriel for long, very long, and much he pondered, and still more wondered in his heart that Lady de Lisle (in reply to his repeated enquiries) had never once named her in her letters; yet in the gentle trustfulness and truthfulness of his nature, he never blamed his mother, never doubted for an instant his dark-haired, tender, bright little fairy; never once imagined, even in dreams, that she had forgotten the friend, the more than brother, she used to regard with so much kindness in those bygone days, so happy, so innocent, so fondly remembered. And then he would call to mind how he would gather for his little sister the freshest flowers, the ripest fruits; how, in early morn, he would rise with the summer's sun, to bring her home a pretty speckled trout for breakfast; how he would fain to have robbed for her the cosy little nest of its tiny fledglings, but that Muriel cried so bitterly when once he brought them to her, and oh! how sorry he felt to have caused her tears, as she said, "Naughty, naughty boy, put them back! oh, pray, put them back!" And then the first ride on his own little white pony! how carefully he had himself seen that the saddle was firm, and the bridle safe for his little playmate, and how pretty she looked; her

round, rosy face, half hidden by her straw hat and green veil, her curls streaming in the wind, her little coral lips pursed up, half in fear, half in pride, to be thus mounted; how carefully, too, he guided little *Pet*, the pony; and when they came to the stream of water, how manfully he tucked up his trousers, and waded through, over his boots rather than leave his little charge, or by returning shorten for her the delights of a first ride. All these dreams of childish days passed through Gerald's mind as he sat smoking his cigar in their sitting-room, which looked upon the turbid waters of the Arno, and far beyond, over the blue mountains. Suddenly enough to startle him—who was so lost to the present—but yet gently and quietly as was his wont, Lord Glentworth entered, his glass in his eye, his hands full of English papers, and his pockets of English letters.

"That confounded fellow, Schmidt," he drawled, meaning the courier, "not being to be found, I went myself to the post, and found various letters awaiting us; and here are yours, Bouverie."

Sir Bouverie took them up,—"My mother, and various business letters, bills, &c." Glancing quickly over the former, and finding all well, he turned to his companion, saying—

"I hope all your people are all right, as mine are, Glentworth."

"Oh, very; but who in the name of all that's—" he paused for an expletive, and finally said, "jolly, do you think are coming, or perhaps already come, to winter here? Why, Beltravers and his wife, who, by-the-bye, has a little son and heir; but that's not it—for we know Beltravers came expressly over to buy up all the old bronzes and daubs in the curiosity shops, and Lady Guinever was to help him; and I daresay they've been awfully cheated and taken in, and that sort of thing. But who else do you think is coming out for the winter?"

Sir Bouverie guessed one young man after another of their coterie, and one lady after another of their fashionable acquaintance,—all in vain. At last, wearied of his companion, and longing once more to return to his day-dreams, he said,

"Really, Glentworth, I think we have pretty well repeated 'Debrett's Peerage' by memory; so, unless it is the Duchess of Glengarrow, and your sister Lady Mildred, I am at a loss to conceive who it can possibly be that is coming, of any interest to us."

"You have hit it, old fellow! Mildred, it ap-

pears, is rather delicate—a cough, you know—and a milder climate advised. My mother says, though she has had offers from half London, she still persists in not changing her name. Perhaps little Pussy's choice is already fixed on, the chaplain at Glengarrow, some half-pay officer, or a briefless barrister. I have heard, young ladies do occasionally commit such atrocities—don't they, eh, Bouverie?"

"Perhaps so," replied he, abstractedly; "but, Glentworth, don't you think it's time to dress for dinner? You know, we dine at the embassy today, and Lord Normanby is punctual; so do go and adorn, and let me adorn, also."

"Ah, Bouverie! such a handsome fella' as you don't require it; 'beauty, when unadorned,' you know"—and so the friends parted to dress.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAFÉ DONEY.

THE Café Doney, situated near the Ponte Santa Trinita, in the centre of the most fashionable quarter of Florence, is the rendezvous in the afternoon and early evening of the *élite* of young Italy. There the members of the (misnamed) Jockey Club meet, to smoke, stare at the women—in short, do anything rather than broach the subject of horses; of which quadrupeds they are, as a general rule, entirely ignorant, except so far as occasionally to sit behind them as they drive—or, more probably, are driven by their coachman—to the Cascines. There, too—oh! honored Doney!—from time immemorial have the unpledged scions of Tuscan rank, eaten thy cool ices, and smoked their cigarettes, discussing, meanwhile, the beauties who nightly display their charms at the Pergola, or daily frequent the green glades of the Cascines,—not forgetting, either, to

recount the "*bonnes fortunes*" which have—or perhaps have not—fallen to their lot; or the gallant adventures of which they may—or may not—have been the heroes, and which certainly compromised the reputation of more than one distinguished signora—frail as fair, if the innuendoes of these exquisites were to be believed. On one of the brightest of these soft southern noons, when mere existence is a delight, we find a coterie of noble Florentine youths assembled at the usual trysting place of the Jockey Club.

"Have you seen the new beauties who are to grace the court of our Grand Duchess and the salons of the corps diplomatique, this winter?" said the Principe di Fiesole to his friend the young Marchese Visconti.

"*Che!* how could I have seen them, my friend, when they have but just arrived?"

"Pardon, Visconti; but they were last night at my Lord Normanby's."

"*Diavolo!*" said the other, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and blowing a cloud; "and were you at the English minister's, Fiesole mio?"

"No, Marquis, I was not; but I met this morn-

ing, Strathearn the attaché, and he speaks in raptures of their beauty."

"And what are they—English, Dutch, French, married or single?"

"*Diavolo!* how you talk—like a magpie. They are English, of very high birth—princesses, I believe."

"Oh! that cannot be," put in young Count Neri, who had been in England; "there are no English princesses, except those of royal blood. These must only be miladis."

"Well, miladis or duchesses, it is all the same thing—they are of the *creme de la creme*, and beautiful as houris; Strathearn told me so."

"And married or single, *amico mio?*"

"They are two sisters; one is the wife of an English virtuoso, always in the studios—the other, the most beautiful, is a maiden; so you and I, Visconti, may pit our coronets and fortunes one against the other, and enter the lists as fair foes. What say you?"

"That I will yield you up the single fair one, my Fiesole, and pay my devoirs to the married beauty."

"Yes," said young Count Neri, "we know what

a Don Juan you are; but in this case the husband is probably jealous—not like our Florentines, who have no objection to being crowned."

"So much the better for you and the Marquis; —that gives a zest to the whole affair, jealousy in a husband being out of date, as you say, here."

"I say, Strathearn," said several voices, as the young attaché passed the door of the Café, "do come in, will you, for an instant—only an instant!"

Mr. Strathearn complied, and was instantly plied with a torrent of questions regarding the beauty of his two countrywomen, lately arrived, whom they insisted must, if their charms had not been overrated, actually displace the medicæan Venus from her pedestal.

"Really," replied the attaché, detesting (as any true English gentleman would, to hear the names of two ladies lightly mentioned in a public café), "you must excuse me, but I cannot presume to pass an opinion. You will, doubtless, be yourselves, the best judges."

"Oh!" said the Prince, "there is, then, a doubt on the matter."

"I did not say so, Prince," was the rejoinder.

"Che!" said the Prince, impatiently, making use of the expletive you hear so perpetually in Tuscany; "you refuse to pass an opinion, which means as much, Mons. Strathearn."

"No, Prince, may it not also mean that some ladies are peerless, and consequently above criticism?"

"*Che, che!*" and "*diavolo!*" resounded on all sides, as the attaché made the best of his way out too glad to escape into the sunlit street.

But a new speaker now made himself heard, in the person of a gentleman who was seated at a small table placed in the back ground, reading a journal.

"Noble gentlemen," he said, "princes, dukes, and counts, I am ready to pledge you in a glass of Monte Pulciano, or any wine you like to name, that these English beauties can in no way compare, with the new *prima donna* who will shortly make her *debût* at the Pergola."

The young *lions* turned upon the speaker, regarding him somewhat superciliously, for he was not of their clique, and was even unknown to them by sight.

"And pray who may *you* be, sir? and what do

you know of these English miladis?" said Count Neri, contemptuously; "though about the *prima donna* you may know something, as you are, perhaps, the prompter, or the candle-snuffer."

A laugh followed this sortie, in which even the stranger joined, though his laugh was an evil one, and caused a grimace in features otherwise regular.

"These noble signori may laugh if they please, but that is not to say, that I have not met these miladis in society; nevertheless, I repeat to their excellencies that the young *debutante,* Signorina Albrandoni is certainly more *simpatica,* and I will add, in actual beauty will be found to bear the palm, even in the presence of the *belle signore Inglesi.*"

"And pray, Signor Paris, who commissioned you to award the golden apple? in other words, who are you?" asked the Prince Fiesole.

"What and who I am matters little; nevertheless, since it pleases the illustrious signori to enquire, I am the second *primo tenore* of the troupe, at your service," said the stranger, taking up his hat, and saluting the company with mock respect.

"Bravo, bravissimo," echoed a multitude of voices,

"Signor primo secondo tenore, we will not fail to go and applaud you and your wonderful *prima donna assoluta.*"

The tenor was leaving with another profound bow, and a smile, when he suddenly turned back, as an open barouche passed slowly by in a line of carriages, for the streets now began to be filled with gay and fashionable promenaders.

"There," he said, indicating the carriage, "are the ladies in question. The further, the Lady Guinever Beltravers, the nearer, her sister the Lady Mildred St. Aubyn."

The young Florentines held their breath to look; and as soon as the carriage was no longer near, a general burst of admiration followed—

"How beautiful!" "What an exquisite creature!" "What splendid hair, like a golden cloud!" "What eyes, heaven's own colour!"

"She is indeed ravishing," exclaimed Prince Fiesole; "the other may be styled *la bella Inglese,* but the tall stately one is, *la bella bellissima.*"

Such were the criticisms called forth by the bright vision, as it passed; such the comments upon the lovely lady Guinever, or rather on her surpassingly beautiful companion, who would even at first

sight, place her elder sister in the shade, though, on further acquaintance, many would yield to Lady Guinever's less dazzling but more winning style of beauty, the preference even as to their personal charms.

Nevertheless, Jove had nodded, and all Olympus trembled at the fiat of the god. In other words, Prince Fiesole had declared that Lady Guinever merited the appellation of *la bella Inglese,* but Lady Mildred must be known at Florence from the present moment, for as long as she was named at all, as *la bella bellissima,* the most peerless of beauties. Therefore it was that in after days crowds awaited the appearance of the ladies at the porch of the palazzo, where the family had taken up its residence; or, did they prefer equestrian exercise, their party was sure to be escorted, at a respectful distance, it is true, by a troop of mounted admirers.

The cascines were more than ever frequented by lions, and even lionesses, who esteemed it quite an event to catch even a glimpse of the beautiful blonde, who excited the enthusiasm of the former, and the envy of the latter, while even the expected *debût* of the new prima donna, despite her reputa-

tion for talent and beauty, bid fair to be a failure, so entirely were the loungers of the lobby engrossed by their admiration of England's fair and aristocratic daughter.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A HAPPY MÉNAGE.

Sir Bouverie de Lisle had now installed himself as the constant companion of Mr. Beltravers in his forenoon visits to the different galleries and studios of Florence.

Heartily sick of the vapid conversation of the indolent young marquis, Gerald was only too happy to make his escape to more congenial society, and blessed the day on which he heard Lord Glentworth drowsily declare with a yawn and a stretch "that he could not make out what his brother-in-law saw in those black-looking churches and dusty galleries;" adding, "that for his part he considered sight-seeing a confounded bore."

To the society of Charles Beltravers, Gerald now owed, not only amusement—the distraction of the passing hour; he also looked up to him as a young man of talent and intellect will, to one his superior

in years and in learning, with a reverence which bid fair to ripen into friendship and affection.

And indeed Charles Beltravers united in a remarkable manner, deep erudition and a philosophical mind, with high moral rectitude, and a fervent though unobtrusive piety. He likewise possessed a refined taste, and an intense love of the beautiful in art and in nature. Studious from earliest youth, the young undergraduate had taken first-class honours at Oxford, and though heir to a large fortune, and of ancient descent, had never taken delight in the pleasures and sports usual with young men of fashion. Nor yet later could Mr. Beltravers ever be induced to mix himself up with politics, or to stand for the county, frankly stating as his reasons, that he, on principle, objected to party spirit, considering each party occasionally in the right, and still more frequently in the wrong.

"I have frequently observed," he would say, "the strange discrepancies between a man's professions when out of office, and his acts when in power. Few, very few, I fear, of our public men suffer themselves to be solely and entirely guided by a pure spirit of true patriotism, unswayed by considerations of self-interest and a sordid ambition."

He maintained that the first duty of a landed proprietor was to his tenantry and their labourers. He continued thus till the age of thirty, living on his estates, building schools, erecting model cottages, dairy farms, instituting book clubs and friendly societies, adored by the working classes, respected by the farmers, hand in glove with the clergyman, living himself in a residence by no means suited to the possessor of vast estates and a colossal fortune; a house even out of repair, though artistically rich in old paintings, antique sculptures, valuable mosaics, and a few rare old manuscripts and choice antiquities of almost fabulous price. But the bookworm, plunged in the lore of bygone ages, was unobservant of the antique and dilapidated condition of his own domicile, as he was likewise heedless of the smiles and glances of the numerous belles of the county society, who made such gracious advances, or blushed, and sighed so demurely, on the few occasions when hazard or public duty brought the master of Earle's Cliffe within reach of the coquettish advances of these fair and enterprising damsels. Yet there nevertheless dawned a day when the even tenor of this tranquil life was destined to suffer change, either for worse or for

better. The would-be recluse had been forced from his solitude by royal command to attend a court concert at Buckingham Palace, because the Prince Consort, who had been greatly pleased with a speech made by Mr. Beltravers at some public meeting for the advancement of science, had most courteously and graciously insisted that the latter should embrace that occasion to pay his devoirs to the Queen. The latter could not but obey the commands of His Royal Highness, and thereby met his destiny.

Lady Guinever St. Aubyn had this season made her debût in the vortex of fashionable society, and was the belle of the season. A timid glance from the softest and most dove-like eyes in the world—such a glance as Daphne cast on the god of day when first he met her sight—a glance full of the sweetest promise occasioned the first tremor of love in the scholar's yet virgin heart, unprofaned by other image, unstained by regretful memories; while tender, pure, maiden-like—new to the world and its crooked ways—young Guinever loved at once and for ever the reserved, but accomplished gentleman, who spoke so well on all subjects of art, poetry, and literature; and when the Duke, her father, who

had long since, for political reasons, desired to make the savant's acquaintance, insisted on carrying him off—a not unwilling captive—to Glengarrow for grouse shooting, the result may readily be imagined.

Amid the grandeur of the mountain scenery of Scotland, where the dark pine forest o'erhangs the pellucid lake, and the red berries of the mountain ash invite the naiad of the stream to cull them for her coral wreath—where the heather ever blooms, and every step is on classic ground, hallowed by the immortal muse of Walter Scott. In that free and noble land—once our enemy, now our sister—the English student wooed and won the Gaelic maiden. With beings so well suited to each other, the electric telegraph of love is indeed lightning quick, and she who "had no cunning to be strange," had plighted to him her troth ere yet she had well awakened from the delirium of finding herself adored, by one she worshipped.

In this rare case the "course of true love *did* run smooth." Parents approved, friends congratulated, and one draw-back only appeared; the house at Earle's Cliffe! how make it habitable for his lovely bride? The question was not long of decision. He must build a home worthy of one so peerless—he

must erect galleries and fill them with the choicest paintings, and arrange the *chef d'œuvres* of sculpture in the corridors. He would complete his collection, and make it equal to the finest in England—for her —all for her. The tropics should contribute for her conservatory their choicest exotics, and birds from all climes should fill her aviary. Italy and France should contribute the grape and the fig, Sicily her oranges, India even, if practicable, should be taxed for fruits which should, spite the unpropitious climate of England, convert the grounds of Earle's Cliffe into a very Eden upon earth; for would not Eve be there present in the very fairest of her daughters. But no apple—no cause of contention should there be in this modern paradise. And so in time they were wedded, as we know, and they started off loving, loved, and happy as it is given to few mortals to be, on their long and artistic tour, hallowed by the hope of making their home—longed for even in the midst of joy—a very dream of beauty for each other, and the children God might give them.

Lady Guinever was herself an enthusiast in art, and painted with rare talent; being likewise devotedly attached to her husband, she could most

fully sympathise in his tastes and pursuits, and —what is, perhaps, still more flattering to a man— could appreciate and admire, as a most intelligent and graceful listener, his highly intellectual and scholastic conversation, even though she did not always so thoroughly comprehend the subject as to feel able to take her part in it.

Not so, however, her fairer sister. Lady Mildred, had she spoken the truth, would, we fear, have echoed the gothic sentiments of her most noble brother, and have excused herself from accompanying her sister and Mr. Beltravers in their dusty and fatiguing promenades, had not Sir Bouverie been of the party; but somehow or other, when this was the case, the dust appeared less obtrusive and the fatigue more bearable, as it was frequently made the excuse for resting the daintiest of little hand which ever nestled in scented glove, on the manly and muscular arm ever ready to proffer its support to the faltering steps of the spoiled and petted beauty who leaned upon it, nothing loth; while Lady Guinever, supremely happy herself, looked on approvingly, smiling on her sister in tender sympathy, protecting in all the dignity of youthful matronhood the young lovers.

The envy excited by the young Englishman in the breasts of princes, dukes, attachés, and even the youthful scions of royalty itself, may readily be imagined. How the Jockey-club openly expressed its opinion that Sir Bouverie was the most fortunate of mortals; indeed, all Florence named him as the future husband of the beautiful girl at whose side he was apparently so assiduous an attendant. While he—shall we confess it?—was so ungallant, at times, as actually to feel relieved, when, from some cause or another, the ladies were prevented from being of the party, for, sooth to say, the lisping prattle of the Lady Mildred, though uttered in silvery accents, and breathed from perfect lips, did not always accord with the serious train of thought awakened in his mind, in the presence of the works of the mighty dead, and Gerald found by experience that an occasional *tête-à-tête* with Charles Beltravers when the latter, warming with enthusiasm, would unlock his treasures of archæological learning, and in words of burning and glowing eloquence, relate some historical tradition of the middle ages, or sketch off graphically some romantic incident in the life of a Salvator Rosa, or a Benvenuto Cellini, he found, as he was fain to confess to himself, that

these moments of free and unconstrained intercourse with this man—so superior, so refined—brought not only greater profit, but even truer and far more intense enjoyment.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY GUINEVER'S PROJECT.

But Sir Bouverie did not contemplate remaining the winter in Italy. Like every true son of Britain, he yearned for his native country, for home, for the social and truly English gatherings at the Christmas hearth of dear Lisle Court—for the honest, kindly greeting of his tenantry—the respectful, silent welcome of the attached dependents—the deep-mouthed baying of the faithful hounds—and more, far more than all, for the tender greeting and congenial society of his mother. One other reason, too—perhaps nearer and dearer even than filial love—caused the envied handsome stranger, the fortunate lover, the rich fashionable Englishman, to become actually home-sick. So he haunted churches, and galleries, and studios, and manufactories of mosaic, with a view to whiling away the time, till a letter—daily expected, anxiously longed for—should arrive,

and which, indeed, could not now be much longer delayed—a reply to one written on his first arrival at Florence, to his mother, in which he had poured out unreservedly before her, all the long pent-up feelings of his heart, repeating to her what he had before told her when in England, that on her approval of his suit would depend all the happiness of his future life.

"Remember," he said, "mother, that I am now a man, and that not only from childhood have I been habituated (as in yourself) to all mental and physical perfection, but in London society too; and in my recent tour in many climes have I met with and known well, women of noble lineage as well as brilliant beauty. It were then needless to urge upon me the objection of youth and inexperience, for it is no longer as a boy ignorant of the world, but with the intense feelings of manhood, approved, too, by reason, that I claim at your dear hands as my bride, my first, my only love. Remember, mother, there are in our brief existence three all-important stages, the birth, the bridal, and the grave. The first made me all your own—the last will, I humbly trust, unite me to my Maker; but for the middle all-important step in life, I implore the sanction of my

earthly parent, feeling deeply that an union unsanctified by a mother's approval, would likewise lack the blessing of God. Let me not, then, hope in vain for your assent, for, though but slightly acquainted with my darling, my mother may feel the fullest confidence that never would her son cost one pang to her heart, nor cast a blot on the unstained escutcheon of the noble name he is proud to bear. Therefore, were she dearer than life itself, and were it possible that his Muriel once proved not worthy, he knows to conquer his soul, to tear her image from his heart, rather than move one iota from the solemn promise and vow he made his mother in the oriel-windowed room of the halls of his ancestry. Therefore," he pleaded, "must she trust him implicitly for this; consent freely, generously, implicitly, to his earnest petition."

In conclusion, he added the assurance, though needless after such promise, that he had had no tidings, either directly or indirectly, of the young lady for three long years, having firmly kept to his resolution to seek no communication with her, either directly or indirectly; he therefore begged his mother to ascertain the whereabouts of Miss Brandon from Mrs. Petersham, as, knowing the goodness of

her heart, and her concern for the welfare of her son, he felt it would be to doubt of both for the first time, did he doubt any longer of her consent.

And yet he did doubt, and like each and all of us who have felt the crisis of our fate to be approaching, he passed in a moment from the elevation of hope almost to the depths of despair. Not that he had any reason for the latter feeling; on the contrary, when he regarded the affair in a common-sense light, everything appeared to be favourable. Even Lady de Lisle's pride of lineage would surely give place to her maternal affection, if she could really be made to feel that Gerald's happiness was entirely bound up in this marriage. Surely, he reasoned, she would sacrifice a mere prejudice to ensure his ultimate good. After all, what could even Lady de Lisle desire more in a daughter than beauty, talent, fascination, a loving, generous nature, and gentle, if not noble birth.

Turning, then, to the contemplation of Muriel, though so long a period had elapsed since they had met, though he had never suffered his lip to breathe to her one word of love, though he had quitted her for years with that one word yet unuttered, still he possessed the sweet conviction that it needed

but that one word to change the whole tenor of that pure life, to ripen the friendship and sisterly affection so openly, so proudly confessed, into the tenderer, dearer, warmer sentiment of virgin love. And yet, at times it seemed as if a shadow fell where sunlight alone should be; a foreboding of ill, a mysterious terror—causeless, unaccountable. Was it that the proverbial uncertainty of all things earthly —the poetical reiteration, that "brightest things ever fade the fleetest," that "Hope, when she smiles the most sweetly, is ever the most deceitful"—was it that these sayings, trite and true, had power to cast a gloom on that young soul? Or was it not rather that a presentiment of evil, the foreshadow of coming sorrow — a prescience sent from afar, the supernatural descending upon the natural, in mute but kindly warning—which caused the youthful cheek to grow pale with thought, and the manly firm step to lose its elasticity?

Sweet Lady Guinever was the first to mark Sir Bouverie's abstraction, and to interpret it favourably for her sister. What is more, she determined, after having ascertained the state of Lady Mildred's heart, and supposing her to be favourably disposed towards her lover, she resolved she would bring matters to a

crisis. Viewing her sister with partial eyes, she only beheld in her the most lustrous beauty and grace, a kind heart, and great accomplishments, (she played the harp with much mechanical skill, and spoke several modern languages).

"True," thought the embryo matchmaker, "Mildred is by no means clever, but then that is unnecessary in a wife. See how stupid I am, compared to Charles, and yet he is the kindest, best, most indulgent of husbands. All men hate blue-stockings; and women have no business to be cleverer than men; so, as far as that goes, Mildred will do. She will be a fond wife, and look lovely receiving his guests, and will well become the family diamonds. And when Sir Bouverie gets into politics, as of course he must, he ought to have a placid wife like Mildred, who will not mind his dining at the House, or staying at the horrid place till five or six o'clock in the morning, three or four nights in the week. Those things would drive me distracted, and I am so thankful that Beltravers hates politics—I never could stand it, never."

Lady Guinever's soliloquy was opportunely interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Beltravers, and the devoted wife, who never could keep a thought from

her husband, motioned him to a seat by her side, and, laying her pretty hand coaxingly upon his shoulder, said—

"Charlie, I was just then thinking how lucky it was that I was married to you, instead of to somebody else."

"Indeed, love! I am very glad you properly appreciate the blessing of such a husband."

"Now, Charles, how provoking you are! and so conceited too. Now I want you for a moment, to forget all about your old paintings and wonderfully curious crystals, and all that, and attend to your little wife."

"My little wife," he said, fondly kissing her, "will always command the first place in my thoughts, and hours, instead of moments, of my time."

"Well then, Charlie dear, to come at once to the point, since we are so happy together, don't you think Mildred and Sir Bouverie would be just as happy?"

Beltravers raised his wife's head from his shoulder, looking intently into her eyes, to see if she really meant what she said; then, turning away, he said, coolly and decidedly—

"No, Guinever, I do not."

The young wife felt the tears start to her eyes for this was the first time she had heard a dissent from lips so loved and revered—the first and only time in the perfect moments of a long two years that soft and gentle voice had addressed her in tones of almost cold severity—the one only time their hearts, their thoughts, their souls, had not moved together in unison. It was but for a moment; in the next his arm was wound around the slender form of his wife, as in terms the most endearing he named her his pet, his bird, his lady love—asking her pardon a thousand times for having called the tear drops to her loving eyes.

"And so," she said, happy, but still with an occasional sob, "you disapprove my plan?"

"What plan, my child?"

"The plan to give to my sister, Mildred, a husband the next best to my Charlie."

"My dear Guinever, trust me; do not meddle with the affair; let things take their course. If Bouverie likes your sister, he will propose; if he does not think of her, neither you nor I, nor the Queen herself, can make him."

"But," persisted the lady, "honestly, Charlie, are they not well suited?" She paused for a reply, but

as none was forthcoming, she added, "Are not they both handsome, accomplished, equal in birth—only she is less clever than he is, as I am than you?"

This time the reply was a tender kiss.

"Now tell me truly, are they not suited to perfection?'

"I fear, my wife," said Beltravers, slowly and deliberately, "under pain of your eternal displeasure, I must answer—*they are not.*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

It is the opening night of the season at the most fashionable theatre of Florence, the Pergola; every box has been taken for a month previous, in anticipation of the very great attractions offered by the Impresario to an appreciative public; for the first performance is, Rossini's Opera Seria Otello, with a splendid cast, comprising the great, the immense Dupréz, as the jealous Moor, and a youthful *débutante*,—the fame of whose voice, talent, and beauty had caused the Prince P—— and the *dilettanti* in general to stand on the tiptoe of critical expectation,—as the "too gentle Desdemona;" while even our friend, the *secondo tenore* was stated to be second only to the peerless Frenchman. There was therefore scarcely standing room in the parterre, and for half an hour before the curtain rose, almost every box

could boast of its complement of rank, beauty, and fashion.

But our business to-night is rather behind than before the curtain; we must introduce our readers into the private dressing-room of the young *prima donna*, Grisella Albrandoni. The Signorina stood before a cheval glass, while the handmaidens in attendance were occupied in putting the finishing touches to her costume, arranging here a fold, and there a crease, now retiring a few paces to observe if the skirt hung gracefully, now advancing nearer to adjust some trifling mistake of the *costumière*. The dress was cut in the fashion of the robes of the noble *damás* of mediæval Venice. A habit of light blue Genoa velvet, with long train over a petticoat of rich white satin embroidered with gold, the whole relieved by a trimming of costly Venetian point, massive gold ornaments on the arms and amid the glossy tresses of brown hair, darkly bright, which lay in silken waves on either side of the broad intelligent brow, and were then drawn back in heavy braids, which, if not positively *en régle* as regards costume, at least set forth to perfection the small Greek head, the virginal throat, and statuesque shoulders of the fair young *debutante*.

Oh! Empress Eugenie, for what sins against good taste have you not to answer! for setting the odious fashion of dying the hair red, and hot-ironing it till it looks like the wool of the negro!

The cheval glass, in truth, reflected a face and form that meritricious Empress might indeed envy, and of which few prima donnas could boast; and if ought could add to its charm, it would be the thought that art had not in this instance, been called upon to redden the cheek now crimsoned with feverish excitement, now pale with nervous apprehension; nor did the coral of the moist and pouting lips—like twin cherries—owe its tint to the dye of the perfumer. Still less had that arch-humbug, Madame Rachel, been invoked to poison the clear brown skin with her white enamel, nor to darken the long silken fringes, shading eyes which now seemed almost to float in an ocean of electric light. True, the complexion might have been fairer, the hands and arms whiter (for the stage) with advantage, and indeed the dressers stood ready with pearl powder and liquid white, *à L'Imperatrice*, and puff, and cotton, and all the paraphernalia of imperial beauty; but the young Signorina smilingly repelled the proffered aid.

"*If*," she said, "my friends,—Grisella Albrandoni

has not talent sufficient for success, she will not owe it to your cosmetics. I think to-night that I am in voice, and," smiling proudly, "I will show the Florentines that I can act; that is," (and for a moment her cheek paled, and she drew a long and painful breath) "if my courage will not fail me in this terrible ordeal."

"*Che!* Signorina, and *Madonna mia,*" screamed the women in the harsh shrill tone peculiar to Italian females; "is not the Signorina certain to be carried in triumph? Did she not create quite a *furore* at rehearsal last evening? Did not the Principe P—— declare that L'Albrandoni would one day rival Frezzolini in her prime? Did not even Maestro Romani say *bravissima!?*"

At that moment the screaming was brought to a sudden termination by a knock at the door of the dressing-room, followed by the entrance of the master *in propriâ personâ.* The young prima donna, who had felt her heart give a violent bound, believing the knock to be a summons for her to prepare for her *entrée en scene,* was inexpressibly relieved at the sight of her master.

Let us, while we give her time to recover, endeavour to describe the intruder. The veteran Pietro

Romani, musical director of the Pergola, is in person small and spare, with aquiline features, and a brow and eye of light grey, bespeaking high intelligence; though an octogenarian, it was his boast that he had never used spectacles, and that with the unassisted eye he could read any musical type, and even decipher the smallest print. The pupil of Veluti, and master of Pasta, Malibran, Grisi, and most of the celebrities of the century, it is needless to add, that as teacher of musical declamation and dramatic singing, Romani still remains without a rival. The friend and companion of Rossini, when that great composer produced in one fortnight the child of his youthful inspiration, the ever fresh and sparkling "*Barbiere di Seviglia,*" pressed by the copyists to finish the score by a certain day, he applied to the then young Pietro to compose for him an air. The mantle of the "*Maestro de Maestri,*" happily descending on his friend, the result appeared soon after in the shape of the Aria for Bartolo "*Manca un foglio,*" a composition in every way so congenial to the spirit of the music, as to have merited the approbation of Rossini himself, who has endorsed its merit, never having to this day disowned the authorship. The master had scarcely

entered and taken his usual pinch of snuff, as he stood in evident delight and admiration before his fair and favourite pupil, when another knock preceded the arrival of Dupréz, already blacked and costumed as the Moor.

We must again here pause for a moment to describe the genius, before whom all other tenors, whether of the Italian, French, or German schools, must hide their diminished heads, even though in the mere gymnastics of vocalization they might hope to compete with this monarch in their mutual art.

Though short of stature, Dupréz is of powerful frame and commanding presence; the countenance, though without any claim to actual beauty, is remarkably fine and intellectual, the massive forehead bespeaking undoubted mental force and firmness, while the expressive and sympathetic smile which occasionally illumines the entire face, suggests irresistibly to the physiognomist, that in the comic vein the great artiste, would be equally at home as in the grander *rôles* of the tragic muse. In private no less than in public life also, could Dupréz become the life of a congenial circle, displaying conversational talents of the highest order, and the most brilliant powers of wit and humour. Add to this

manners of remarkable fascination when he wished to please, and you have the portrait of one of the greatest artists, whether as a vocalist or histrionic genius the world has ever produced.

"Buona sera carina," said the old man to his favourite, gallantly raising her hand to his lips, "how beautiful thou art to-night! what sparkling eyes! and that blue velvet suits the complexion so well, too!"

"Oh! dear master, have done talking about my appearance, I entreat, and tell me how soon is my trial to commence?"

"Your trial, my daughter! say rather your triumph."

"Would that it might be so, but tell me, dear Signor Romani," coaxingly, "is it too late to replace my opening air with that pretty duett? you know," taking his hand.

"What duett, cara?"

"Why, you know, maestro, the one with Emilia, '*Vorrei che il tuo pensiero.*'"

"*Che!* what whim is that, bella signora? you know we have not rehearsed it, and perhaps have not even the orchestral parts at hand."

"Then let me miss it, maestro."

"What a prima donna, miss her *aria?—che!* are you mad, carina?"

"Ah! *maestro,* if I am frightened I shall never be able to get through my solo."

"My dear little lady, one thing is quite certain, which is, that if you are frightened you will sing neither the solo nor the duett." And by way of enforcing this observation the maestro deliberately took from his pocket his snuff-box, and still more deliberately took a pinch of snuff.

"Oh! now that you have brought the snuff-box to your aid," laughed the *débutante,* "I see I must submit to my hard fate, but first let me appeal to Monsieur Dupréz, for though Romani has no compassion on his pupil, surely Otello, despite his black looks, will take the part of his gentle Desdemona, remembering the terrors, long past, of his own *début.*"

But the great *primo tenore* was, we regret to say, so ungallant as to side against the lady, and insist with the master on the opening air. Nay, the appeal of the distracted young *débutante* for sympathy was actually turned into ridicule by the cruel Moor, who looked so comic with his blacked face, that Gisella declared if she looked at him she should not be able to sing for laughing.

"Aha! my little pupil," exclaimed old Romani, taking and holding between thumb and finger another pinch of snuff, "do not reverse the order of my instructions; remember Romani's motto is, 'Let a young lady be serious in her conduct, and *leggiera*, light, in her vocalization;' so you, signorina, if you begin to act with levity, I shall expect to hear the singing *pesante*, heavy—" and he finished the pinch.

"*Allons!*" said Dupréz, "that is not bad, maestro." Then, turning gallantly to the young prima donna, he said, "To act with so lovely and so talented a young lady we must invoke the aid of Apollo, that he will vouchsafe us at forty-five some of the fire of our youthful days."

"Ah! Monsieur," she replied, gracefully, and with a charming smile, "genius is ever young."

A call for the Maestro Romani, as the opera was about to commence, put a stop to the conversation, and Dupréz, who would shortly have to enter "*en scene*," saluting in a kind and friendly manner the young *débutante*, left with the director.

Once more alone with the females, Gisella cast a last look on the mirror, took a raw egg to strengthen and clear her voice, and then sat down to

palpitate and tremble, to sing little snatches of her opening air, and to count the moments till the much-dreaded but still more longed-for moment should arrive—which would place her with the many who fail,—or crown her fondest hopes, realizing the dream of her young life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DÉBUTANTE.

It came at last—the eventful moment pregnant with consequences, of even fatal import—had she but known it—to the *débutante*. A summons from the stage manager, followed immediately by the hurried step of the master, Romani himself.

"Now, *carino, coraggio!*" he said, drawing the young girl's arm within his own; "only have courage, and all will go well."

The poor child clung to the arm of her master, as if its very contact could endue her with the strength she so much needed—the strength to master an almost overwhelming emotion. As she passed through the crowd of loungers which ever encumber the passages leading to and from the stage of a theatre, she was too absorbed to hear, happily, the various remarks, made always in a disrespectful tone, on her personal attractions, or even slight defects—happily,

we repeat; for the vulgar comments made by the *habitués* of the *coulisses*, especially if Italians, upon the actress, could not have failed to wound the delicacy of the maiden and the lady; for when once a woman puts foot on the boards of a theatre, however modest and virtuous she may be, it is certain that she is considered in a manner as public property, and each and every young and old libertine, imagines he has the right to judge, or, perhaps, *mis*judge her. But Gisella faltered on, unheeding remarks, which we prefer leaving to our reader's imagination rather than transcribing—her head dizzy, her throat parched, her limbs almost refusing their support to the trembling frame. A moment, and the desire seized her to break away, and fly for her life—in her madness of the moment she cared not whither. But the master had now firmly clasped her slender waist, and was half leading, half carrying her forward. Coming near the side scenes, they met Dupréz. The great tenor divining, from the death-like pallor of the girl, and the anxious look of the master, the state of the case, whispered encouraging words to Gisella;—and then to Romani.

"Never fear, maestro; I will guarantee all will go well after the first air—it is only a little stage fright,

which the public expect in a débutante. Remember, Rossini says, 'It is fools alone who know not fear.' Force her out, maestro—force her out."

And Romani did so, and in another moment the almost fainting girl is standing alone upon the stage, hearing, as in a dream, the encouraging plaudits of the audience—always indulgent to a first appearance —especially (as in this case) when youth and beauty combine to enlist their sympathies. Seeing, as in a mist, the sea of faces beyond the footlights, hearing, as from a distance, the refrain played by the orchestra, and feeling that there was, as it were, a weird spell upon her, from which now there was no escape, even in flight—yes, she must make a violent effort, and commence.

The first few bars of the recitative were almost inaudible; in the remainder, the notes, though still feeble and trembling, rang out clear and bell-like. The singer phrased perfectly (how could a pupil of the veteran Romani do other?), so the public suspended its judgment, and waited for the *cavatina*, the *andante* of which was still marred by the paralysis of fright, at the commencement; but before she came to the end, the young singer had entirely regained her self-possession, and the rich contralte

notes rolled forth in all their grandeur. In the *cabaletta* the *prima donna* left nothing to be desired; the coldest critic could not deny that her clear enunciation of the rapid passages was perfect, and at the conclusion the *artiste* was greeted with long, and well-merited applause.

The first act passed off well, and when the youthful *débutante* (who on the stage appeared scarcely sixteen,) was led on by Dupréz, the timid modesty and shrinking grace of her manner won all hearts, and achieved the conquest her talents and beauty had begun.

"She is the most perfect lady I ever beheld on the stage!" said Princesse Elise P. "I do not except even Erminia Frezzolini. What say you, Prince?"

Her husband echoed the sentiment of his wife; and, indeed, the opinion among the aristocratic audience seemed unanimous on this subject.

"Upon my word," said our friend, Prince Fiosole, to the Marchese Visconti, "I am not sure that little *canaglia* of a *primo secondo tenore* was not right. The Albrandoni might almost compete in beauty even with my *bella bellissima*."

"There certainly might be a doubt on the subject,

caro mio: indeed, as far as I am concerned, I prefer the *prima donna.*"

"The English *miladi* is very beautiful, but too cold, too stiff. Now this little thing is full of soul. I shall certainly make her acquaintance, *amico,* —not an easy thing, they tell me,—but, see, the curtain rises."

And a general hush, to bespeak silence, goes round the theatre.

The second act of this opera contains the grand scena, which combines the most difficult vocalisation with immense dramatic effect. Here the appreciative Italian public, well knowing the arduous task the young singer had undertaken, had determined to be very indulgent. But there was no need. Incited by the greatness of her colleague's superlative genius, the *artiste* was now under inspiration, and surpassed herself. The complicated and difficult *aria—Che smania,* the terror of prima donnas, was given with a verve, and at the same time with a method, which fairly astonished the *dilettanti;* and in the grand *scena* with her father, Desdemona left nothing to be desired.

The third act of Othello, as all the musical world knows, is a masterpiece of histrionic effect, and here

the young *prima donna* seemed, as it were, actually to luxuriate in the exquisite ideas of the divine composer—to have become intensely imbued with his genius. The plaintive recitative, the tender and touching romance of the willow, the heartrending moan of the *preghiera*—all were sung and acted in a way which drew the unbidden tear to many a bright eye. But when Dupréz, after the long recitative, given with surpassing grandeur, in a paroxysm of jealous fury—terribly real, drags his unhappy, but guiltless victim, from her couch and flings her with violence to the ground; when, with the long, dark tresses, floating in rich waves down the snowy robe, Desdemona kneels at the feet of the cruel Moor—real terror in her eyes—the cry of despair in her voice, as each moment he alternately taunts and threatens, till a prey to the horror inspired by the shadow of the awful deed the frenzied husband is about to commit, the doomed wife utters a fearful shriek of agony, and flies round the stage in the vain endeavour to escape her fate—oh! then, the audience forgot to applaud—the sight was too appalling, the scene too terribly real. Dupréz had vanished, and in his place stood the husband, maddened with jealousy, thirsting for the blood of the traitress; and in

place of the *prima donna*, with her conventional mannerisms and stage tricks, there crouched, pale and shuddering, a true, tangible Desdemona, a guiltless victim—ah! "falsely, falsely murdered!" On such a stage picture let us drop the curtain.

There was a pause; but afterwards the *artistes* were recalled with cries—with yells—of enthusiasm, such as are heard in Italy only; while the stage was turned into a very *parterre* of flowers—meet carpet for the tread of its queen! But Dupréz alone obeyed the call—unaccompanied. The youthful *débutante* had fainted.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LADY GUINEVER AT HOME.

To one of those charming reunions "*sans façon et sans cérémonie,*" which render continental society so much more easy and pleasant than our own stiff, well-bred crowded and uncomfortable parties, we now invite our readers to bear us company. Indeed, they may scarcely hope to pass a more agreeable evening than in the elegant and palatial salons of the palazzo—in that refined circle of mingled aristocracy and art there assembled to do homage to the intellect and position of the host, the grace and beauty of the hostess. An air of English comfort too is not here wanting to perfect the charm of this fascinating coterie, comprising the very *élite* of Italian and foreign society; for the presiding deity, sweet Lady Guinever, ensconced in her pretty boudoir, is making the tea, with her own fair hands, and dispensing her social

home-like hospitality, together with her enchanting smiles amongst the various lovers of the fragrant beverage, principally, of course, English and Russians, now grouped around the table. In a larger salon, called the music-room, because Erard has furnished it with a harp and piano, sits enthroned, her sister, the *belle par excellence*, the Lady Mildred St. Aubyn, a queen surrounded by her court, receiving the homage of dukes, marquises, counts, and belted earls, with a proud smile of languid indifference, which is so well suited to her cold statue-like beauty. Here the Italian fashion of ices and sorbets was the order of the evening; and here too might be heard occasionally some of the most distinguished amateurs and artistes of Italy, only too proud to be invited to display their various talents before a society so distinguished.

"Yeth," lisped the beauty, in answer to Prince Fiesole, "we did rather expect the *prima donna* thith evening, but they thay the will not go out into the world. Itth really quite dithappointing."

Having finished this (for her) wonderfully long sentence, Lady Mildred relapsing into silence and roseate smiles, sank back exhausted on the blue

satin couch, which seemed, as if made expressly to bear the gossamer robes of the delicate creature pressing so lightly its silken cushions.

"Ah! here is Mr. Beltravers," said Prince Fiesole, approaching his host, who gave him a friendly British "*shake hands*," as the Prince expressed it, "and are we to have the *prima donna* to-night? or would that crowning felicity be too much for us mortals, in the midst of such enchantment?"

"I am very sorry, Prince, to say that my wife's invitation to our talented young countrywoman (for she is English,) has met with a decided and hopeless refusal."

"Indeed!" said the Marchese Visconti; "I should have thought the *prima donna*, a *débutante* too, would have been only too glad of such patronage."

"It appears," returned Beltravers, "the excitement of acting is too much for her, so that she requires complete repose, the days she does not sing."

"*Che!*" said various *lions*—"I suspect she has a passion—or, perhaps, some jealous old Bartolo locks her up; why should acting affect *her* more than others?"

"No, no, depend upon it, there is something more than meets the eye."

"They *do* say," said Count Neri, lowering his voice, so as to be unheard by the ladies, "they *do* say that"—

"Now, now—no cancans here," cried the Prince; "my friends, we have our Jockey Club to talk scandal."

"Ah! buona sera, milor," making room for the young Marquis of Glentworth, who entered just then, and advanced to greet his sister—"we were discussing the Albrandoni, who, I regret, we are not to have the pleasure of hearing to-night."

"Ah! I am sorry—for, besides singing like a bird, and acting divinely, she is sweetly pretty."

Sir Bouverie, who had been paying his devoirs to the Lady Mildred, now turned, somewhat surprised, towards his friend, it was so rare to hear the blasé young marquis speak without a yawn, of any created thing save, perhaps, his pet hunter, or his favourite deer hound, Oscar, that Gerald may well be pardoned his glance of curiosity, almost incredulity.

"Upon my soul though, Bouverie, I am serious this time. I'm not a sentimental chap by any means, as you know; but, by Jove! there is some-

thing about that girl that one don't see in every one. A man might be excused if he made an ass of himself for such a woman."

"Never saw you so animated before, my dear fellow, about man, woman, or child; you quite excite my curiosity. I declare, I feel dying to see this phœnix, this paragon—pray, is she in the tragic or comic line?"

"Tragic," said Lady Guinever, who had joined the circle for a moment, as she passed; "for I am not ashamed to own, that she made me shed many tears over the fate of the gentle Desdemona."

"I was about to say she excels in the comic line, when miladi forstalled me," said the Prince; "for a more piquante, coquettish, merry, and laughter-loving Rosina could not exist. I never laughed so much as at the tricks she played off upon old Bartolo."

"And what does the Lady Mildred say?" said a lanquishing young attaché of nineteen, who fancied himself an incipient Byron, and had already promoted the beauty to the honours of being his "Mary"—the lady of his thoughts.

"Oh! I am no judge—but I was of courth immenthly amuthed; and really for a perthon of

that clath, as Glentworth thays, the ith quite pretty."

The Byronic and youthful attaché hung over his "Mary," more enamoured than ever—and so "*empressé*" as to distance the other admirers, who were now discussing sandwiches, punch, and the *prima donna*, in a more intimate manner, no ladies being near.

"But, Glentworth," said Bouverie, "you have never described this wonder of the world. Come let's have the lovely, What's-her-name, Stella?"—

"Gisella," put in the Marquis—"the lovely Gisella's portrait. The cruel fair," he pursued in a tragic comic voice, "has, I am told, refused most positively to sit for her likeness."

"*Che! che!* what matters," exclaimed a chorus of *jeuns gens*—"make her portrait yourself, milor, as Sir Bouverie has not seen her—describe, describe."

"Let me see, she is not tall."

"Oh! dumpy; I hate a dumpy woman," quoted Bouverie.

"Nor short,—dark, nor fair, neither rosy nor pale."

"Lucid certainly," put in Bouverie. "I have about as good an idea of your beauty, Glentworth,

as I have of the heroine of Miss Braddon's last sensation, which I have not read."

"Can't help it, old fellow; but the long and the short of it is, Gisella—(sweet name isn't it?)—is deuced pretty, and clever, and all that; and you must come and hear her, and judge for yourself."

"Ah!" chimed in the "*lions*," "we are all raving about her; milor is right, we know not whether to give the palm to her talent or beauty."

"Oh! if you are all spooney," laughed Sir Bouverie, "I need not so much wonder at my cool *blasé* friend here; there is safety in numbers."

"I don't know," rejoined he, "sometimes they rather give a zest to the pursuit. What will you all say if I make the lady, Marchioness of Glentworth?"

"Bravo, bravissimo, milor! we can all afford to lay our titles at the feet of the signorina, *by the left hand though*, which of course is understood; and who knows, if even the English woman may not prefer a son of our warmer clime, to one of her own foggy land, *chi sa, chi sa?*"

All, even Lord Glentworth, joined in the laugh, with the exception of Sir Bouverie, in whose fine expressive countenance a spark of annoyance was perceptible.

"Come, Glentworth, shall we be walking homewards? the night is lovely, and in the light of the moonbeams, signori, even your yellow Arno looks pellucid."

"As you like, old fellow; I'm your man."

So the young men passed out together, and finding the night so balmy and serene, prolonged their stroll as far as the Cascines; both were silent, for each in his manner felt the soft beauty of the midnight hour, but the higher nature, as is ever wont, felt the deeper the more intensely. Sir Bouverie's thoughts flew far away—to home—to his mother—to Muriel. Why had not Lady de Lisle replied to his letter, the time had surely been ample, but then these foreign posts were so uncertain—the letter might be even now in the post office, these fellows are so careless; but my mother's hand, thought he, is so legible. Can she be ill?—no, I should have heard. And then the painful idea forced itself upon him that his mother, so tender of giving him pain, could not send him good news, and therefore preferred silence. Oh! but suspense is of all evils the worst—all others we can nerve ourselves to bear, but suspense kills.

"Bouverie," said Lord Glentworth; "why what

a start—five shillings for your thoughts, old fellow."

"And yours—I'll wager ten to one they were upon the prima donna, for upon my word I begin to believe you are smitten at last—Eh! Glentworth."

"If I thought seriously of a woman, do you think I should have joked about her before those young monkeys there, my dear Bouverie?"

"No—and since you mention it, I was vexed at the turn the conversation took, for though I would sooner put my right hand in the fire than marry an actress, I—"

"And why so, Bouverie? supposing her to be a correct person?"

"Because a young girl habituated to the display of her fascinations nightly before the public must have lost that retiring modesty of mind, that perfect purity of soul, which to me is a woman's greatest charm. Nor could I bear the idea that my wife had been in daily and intimate association, engaged in mimic love scenes, with men whom we do not admit into our circles, and who are known to be, as a body, to say the least of it, very lax in their morals. Nevertheless, dear Glentworth, I do not deny that this young girl may be virtuous, respectable in her

class of life, forced, perhaps against her will, on the stage in order to support a sick mother, or a family of helpless brothers and sisters; therefore, I would respect an actress as long as she continued to respect herself, but neither by the right hand, nor by the left, ought she ever to become Marchioness of Glentworth—in this I feel sure we agree."

"I say, Bouverie, when did the family living become vacant, and are you studying for orders? because you seem a first-rate hand at a sermon; but as preaching always makes me sleepy, and we are at the door of the hotel, I shall wish you a very good night."

"And pleasant dreams," added Bouverie, and so they parted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WILL SHE ACCEPT?

BEFORE we are enabled to put an end to Sir Bouverie's very natural anxiety, the necessity of our tale will oblige us to retrace our steps a year or so, and return, however reluctantly, to Argyll Street, where we last saw poor Muriel, whom in despite of her many failings and imprudences, we love with a feeling akin to pity.

Miss Brandon has now been lodging with Mrs. Peachum some nine or ten months, and it is on a Sunday—black, rainy, and dismal, as only London Sundays can be—that we again meet her. Oh! ye London sabbaths—days of outward forms, miscalled piety, days misnamed the Lord's—how shall I describe your weariness? how paint your deserted streets, your fashionable churches filled with fashionable worshippers, who, all crinolined, be-Racheled, and chignoned, declare themselves to be miserable sinners, whose lips mutter, "Lord have mercy,"

while the roving eye wanders in search of such distraction as may be afforded by the sight of some bonnet of newest type, some robe of Paris mould; who, hearing the church's command to fast, to keep under the body, and use a wholesome self-denial, are yet none the less ready, even in Lent, for the hot lunch and capital glass of ale, or sherry, which, the disagreeable duty over, await them at their homes, when perhaps the only reference to the holy character of the day will be by the lady to her lord thus—"Our rector gave us a good sermon to-day, my dear; I really could not help thinking how hard it must have hit Mrs. W——, you know." Or the husband—"The curate was not happy to-day; I could scarcely keep my eyes open, he has such a drawling delivery." Or one of the daughters—"Mamma, dear, did you observe Clara B.'s new bonnet? I declare it's the fifth she has had this season; I can't think how she manages; I *know* she has only thirty pounds a-year; I wonder if Brown could copy it if Clara would let her have a look at it?"

Thus we see there is at least some dissipation going on in church, and if the streets in the early part of the day wear an air of dreariness as of a pestilence-ridden city, in the afternoon the people flock to the park in

crowds to jostle and stare at each other, having nothing else to do; this is so deadly lively, that we confess to preferring a book, or the pious contemplation of the opposite chimney-pots at home. But it must not be imagined that the London Sabbath, if it put on outwardly such an air of austerity, be altogether an unjolly day; on the contrary, it is decidedly hypocritical, for with all its air of pious gloom, it is the day *par excellence* for dinner parties at home, at Greenwich, at Richmond, and what not, for the well-to-do classes, and for the poorer people the law kindly permits the gin palaces to keep gala, though such ungodly places as the Crystal Palace, the public galleries, museums, &c., are ordered to be hermetically closed. Thus the working man, having no rational means afforded for whiling away his leisure time, flies for excitement to the gin palace so providentially provided for him by the sanctimonious law-givers of what is supposed once to have been "merrie England."

On one such solemn Sabbath, then rendered doubly dreary by the black smoky sky and the dirty rain which poured down in pitiless torrents, did poor Muriel sit alone in silent contemplation of these crooked, dingy, and very objectionable chimney-pots

which bounded the view from the small windows of the back drawing-room she occupied in Argyll Street. Muriel, we have said, is alone—alas! poor child, most truly and entirely alone in the world; friends she has none, relations selfish and narrow-minded, she has by her own imprudence entirely alienated; money she has, it is true, a clear six-hundred pounds a-year, and this, strange to say, contributes as much, if not more than all, to detach from her all human sympathies, for many, very many there are, while charitable (as it is termed) to poverty in rags, still withhold all their sympathy from the unhappy whose purse is full, as if forsooth physical starvation were the only evil, as if the woman with yet a sufficiency for all material wants might not be starving, fainting, aye, dying perhaps, for lack of that wine and milk of human kindness filthy lucre can never purchase.

And Muriel did pine and waste away, heart and soul, though being blest with health, youth, and an excellent constitution, she did not suffer in appearance other than that she is somewhat thinner, and her eyes wear a sadder look, though the flush on her cheek is at times as bright as ever, and her smile as joyous.

Be it likewise remembered that amongst other miseries Muriel had to endure this—that never since the departure of Sir Gerald had she heard one word about him, except indirectly, nor was the report which by chance reached her ears, exactly calculated to restore her cheerfulness, for rumour had named Sir Bouverie de Lisle the affianced lover of the Lady Mildred St. Aubyn. Now, though Gerald had never, as we are aware, uttered to her one word of love—though she had never dared in her wildest dreams to imagine herself the chosen bride of the heir of the de Lisles, the daughter-in-law of the noble lady on whose proud beauty she had looked with so much awe; still, somehow to realise the idea of his marriage with another, and one so far removed from her sphere, was to poor Muriel painful, most painful. All these thoughts thronged through the heart and brain of our sad little heiress on that damp, wretched Sunday—it was a grief too deep, too dull for tears, for in the lowest depths of an almost despairing sorrow, even tears desert us.

We have said Muriel was utterly alone, and deprived of all sympathy—we were wrong—at least there is one only exception, and, we will add too, unhappily for her. Count Waldemar Costesca was

still a daily visitor, and it began at last to dawn even upon Muriel herself what were his eventual aims and intentions. Nor did the deluge on that dreary Sabbath preclude the Count's accustomed call. Precisely at four o'clock his well-known knock was heard, and, as was his wont, he mounted the staircase and entered the room unannounced, as if quite master of the situation.

"And how is my lovely pupil this truly English afternoon?"

"Not very bright, as you may perceive, Count," forcing a smile.

"Ah! *dio mio!* what imprudence! sitting on such a day with the window open! Indeed, Signorina, you will get a sore throat, and then adieu the delicious voice, farewell the lessons I so love to give," shutting the window.

"Ah, I forgot, I have a paper for you, the 'Sunday Times;' it has news of a friend of yours. Ha! ha! ha!" and he laughed his evil laugh, which was a grimace, and Muriel hated him when he laughed. She took the paper, the Count pointing to the paragraph. He watched her all the time with his cold, grey, lack-lustre eye. Muriel read as follows:—

"There appears now no doubt that a marriage is on the tapis between Sir B—— de L——, who will be one of the richest commoners in England, and the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Duke of G——. Sir B——, it is said, is now travelling in the East in company with the brother of his peerless bride elect, the marriage, therefore, cannot take place immediately."

Now Muriel had great self-command, founded on the basis of female delicacy and maiden pride, she therefore merely returned the paper without a comment, nor could the Count perceive the death-like pallor of her cheek and lips; in this, the gloom of a London afternoon stood her friend.

"She has shed no tears," he said mentally; "perhaps, after all, she cares nothing for the proud boy."

He therefore resolved, if possible, to get from the young lady that day a decision upon a subject he had before broached to her, and which lay very near his heart—if heart he had. "Have you, oara Signorina, given my proposition your due consideration, may I ask?"

"I have thought it over, Count," she replied, endeavouring to steady her voice.

"And your decision?"

"The question is of so much importance that I must have more time to think about it."

"But," said the Count impatiently, "you are fully aware, Signorina, that my professional engagements are such as to necessitate my leaving London by this day week at the latest; and your acceptance of my proposition would entail upon me the arrangement of various matters, which would have all to be settled before I could leave. Dearest Signorina, why, then, delay a decision which I feel convinced would further your happiness, and make me the proudest of mortals?"

He paused, hoping for a favourable reply.

"At any rate," she mused, "I can no longer remain here. Mrs. Peachem gave me warning this morning for to-morrow week."

"The old witch!" interrupted Costesca.

"And I am sorry to say, Sarah, the maid, who has been with me so long, is leaving. I can't think why, nor will she explain."

"Prudish old fool!" muttered the Count between his teeth; "but *raison de plus*, my dear young lady, this only confirms what I have before had the honour to suggest for your consideration; and now that your cousin—isn't he?—Sir Bouverie is engaged——"

"Well, sir, what has that to do with the subject?"

"Oh, nothing, certainly, only it is, perhaps, one more barrier, as it were, removed; there can now be no reason why you should not follow the dictates of your own heart, the call of your '*nature d'élite*;' it is now or never, Signorina, believe me."

"Then it will be *never*, Count; but give me only two more days to reflect, and then whatever my future destiny, I shall never have occasion to reproach you. Now go, and do not call again till Tuesday. On that morning you shall receive a note which will bring you my final *yes* or *no*. Till then adieu!"

"Rather *au revoir*, beautiful and fascinating creature, whom I would see appreciated as she merits. Adieu, fairest flower, whom Costesca would fain behold transplanted to a more congenial soil."

So rhapsodizing, the Count took the fairy fingers into his own, and was preparing to raise them to his lips, but Muriel coldly withdrew her hand, saying with more formality of manner than she had yet shown—

"In bidding you adieu, Count, I must beg you to remember that whatever may be my eventual determination, I shall ever consider that you have

invariably acted towards me with the most disinterested generosity and kindness. You will, I assure you, never cease to have a claim on my gratitude."

Thus speaking, the little hand so late withdrawn, was again offered; but this time, though the Count took it and pressed it with a feeling perhaps warmer than mere respect, he did not attempt to imprint on it another kiss, but, turning, immediately left the room, the by no means pleasant grimace very visible on his countenance, as he passed down the dingy staircase and out into the dreary street.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LETTER ANSWERED.

Now it came to pass, by one of those unexpected and improbable chances which occasionally in this changful world have the power of making or marring our happiness, at least temporarily, that the Baroness de Lisle, who rarely, if ever, left home, especially during the autumn and winter months, should chance to be away on, and for some period after, the arrival of Sir Bouverie's letter, nor did she indeed actually receive it till her return to Lisle Court, after a three weeks' sojourn in Scotland. The Duchess of Glengarrow having taken her daughter, Lady Mildred, to Florence, had there left her under the *châperonàge* of her married sister, the Lady Guinever Beltravers, and had journeyed duteously homeward to join her husband and their younger children at Glengarrow. Resting for one night *en route* at Lisle Court, her Grace had given her friend

the Baroness a glowing *vivâ voce* description of the felicity of the little party she had just left on the banks of the Arno, a subject to both ladies (especially to the noble hostess) of exhaustless interest.

"Our beloved children being so united and happy, and all our plans so likely to be realized, you must not, dear Baroness, condemn yourself any more to solitude. Why not let me carry you off to Glengarrow? Come with me for ten days or so; I assure you it will be quite a charitable action. The Duke is always away, deer-stalking, and the children are mostly with Mademoiselle Amanda, who is quite a treasure, by the way, so I shall really die of *ennui* if you say me nay, my dear friend."

The Baroness made a fair show of resistance, but in the end suffered herself to be persuaded. A letter from Bouverie next morning, too (not *the* letter) clenched her resolve; so she wrote to her son by return, laying on him the maternal commands, that he should address the next communication to Glengarrow Castle. This letter was probably lost on the road, for it never reached Sir Bouverie's hands; had it done so, it would have saved him a world of anxiety. Once in the Highlands, it was not easy for the southern lady to make her escape from

the friendly hospitality of these, her oldest and most valued friends—though the prison wards were not of adamant, nor the fetters which bound her other than the silken bonds of affection. Her Majesty, too, had signified her gracious intention, during some deer-stalking expedition, in which she should accompany the Prince Consort, and which would lead them towards the neighbourhood of Glengarrow, to come and ask the Duchess for luncheon. The Queen's friendly message evidently meant that she desired to be treated "*sans ceremonie*,"—but what subject, especially what Duchess, whose liege lord possessed a rent roll of one hundred thousand pounds per annum, would hear of treating her sovereign *sans ceremonie?* Therefore, her Grace, feeling highly the honour proposed, made mighty preparations to receive Scotland's Queen; and there was a great gathering of clans, and Highland games for the retainers of the Duke, in addition to the splendid banquet which was prepared in the baronial hall of the castle for the refreshment of her Majesty and her royal Consort. To all these festivities the Baroness was bidden; nor would the Duke and Duchess hear of her departure till after the royal visit had taken place; it would look, they

said, as if the lady of Lisle Court were wanting in loyalty; if her Majesty had come unannounced, they pleaded, well and good—but now, *impossible,* quite out of the question; it would be a personal slight to the Queen. And, in fact, they were right; and so owned Lady de Lisle, and postponed her journey a week longer, nothing loth to meet in private life that royal lady, so beloved and honoured by her people, who, throned and crowned, is also like the virtuous woman of King Solomon, "a crown to her husband."

But we do not intend to be present at the festivities of Glengarrow Castle, though they were indeed princely, and such as are rarely seen except in the Highlands of Scotland. We must rather accompany the Baroness on her return to Lisle Court, where she found the letter from her son; and, quickly perceiving that it had been for some time waiting her arrival, it may be imagined that poor old Stephens came in for a full share of blame in that he had not forwarded this letter so precious, on recognizing the handwriting. But Stephens begged most respectfully to remind her ladyship that he had asked my lady if he should forward her ladyship's letters, and that my lady had

replied in the negative; which, being a true bill, her ladyship had, of course, nothing to reply to her faithful seneschal.

The first impression made on Lady de Lisle on the perusal of her son's letter, was one of the most unmitigated astonishment; so completely had the Duchess imbued her with the idea of the perfect understanding between the Lady Mildred and the young Baronet—so entirely had she given her to understand that such most desirable marriage was virtually a settled thing, so that she perused and re-perused her letter, scarcely believing she read aright. The lady's second thought, we will do her justice to believe, was to ask herself this mental question:—"If Bouverie's happiness be really and truly bound up in this young girl, ought I not to waive all scruples of pride of birth rather than see him a wretched and disappointed man?" Her third was an impulsive desire to fly to Florence, and, in person, endeavour to convince her son that such an alliance would be little short of madness—to conjure him, by his unstained name, his proud lineage, if he loved her, or valued all that the world holds most valuable, to abandon for ever the idea of such a *mésalliance*. Her fourth (and if second thoughts

are best, how much better must fourth thoughts be?)—her fourth idea then was, to endeavour to find out the young lady's present abode, to see her, and judge her (Ah! my lady, we fear with your prejudices, we should rather say, to *mis*judge her), and then——but here her project stopped short, and merged into the old proverb, "Time will shew."

But how to find out Miss Brandon? Here an idea faintly loomed on Lady de Lisle's memory, that once, a year or so since, Jackson had returned from London, bursting, as it were, with untold news; her maid, indeed, had once, whilst engaged in brushing her lady's long jetty tresses, commenced speaking about the Doctor's pretty niece, but meeting with no encouragement (the Baroness never permitted the gossip of servants), the disappointed abigail dropped into silence. This remembrance had, however, given Lady de Lisle some clue, however faint. Restraining, therefore, her curiosity and impatience with the greatest difficulty, she quickly despatched the almost untasted dinner, and turning to the old man, who always presided, standing behind his mistress's chair, and occasionally offering her wine, she said:

"Good Stephens, I am so fatigued, and my head

aches, oblige me by sending Flimsey at once to my dressing room. I shall take tea there."

Old Stephens left, as quickly as his rheumatism would permit him, to bear the message to Mrs. Flimsey. Meanwhile, the Baroness retired to her dressing room, where she exchanged her travelling dress for an elegant *robe de chambre* of white silk, wadded and quilted, and trimmed with swansdown, so as to make it a very nestling place of warmth. Flimsey, after assisting her lady to disrobe, had placed the pretty boudoir tea service, with its plate of delicate, tempting biscuits, on the small table at hand; she then gave the finishing touch to the fire, lighted the alabaster night lamp in the bedroom, and was preparing to leave the room, when recalled by the voice of her mistress—

"Flimsey!"

"Yes, my lady."

"Pray, desire Jackson to-morrow to see that some game is sent to Dr. Petersham."

"Yes, my lady."

"Pheasants particularly; the Doctor likes pheasant."

"Yes, my lady."

"And, Flimsey, I think I will send some also to

the Doctor's sister. Do you know her name and address? I have forgotten them."

She never knew either, but was beating about the bush, not to excite the wonder and curiosity of Flimsey too much.

"If you please, my lady, I never heard of the Doctor's sister. I knowed he had a niece."

"Ah! yes; Miss—what—Brandon, I believe. Where does she live?"

"Goodness me, my lady!" and here the abigail's tongue became at once loosened; "and hasn't your Ladyship heard?"

"No, indeed, Flimsey."

And as the Baroness's curiosity was now fairly excited, the maid perceived it was now time to speak out all she knew.

"Well, my lady, Mrs. Peachum, who, as your Ladyship knows, was for so many years nuss in the family, says to me, says she, when I was in Lunnon last year, 'Do you know, Flimsey, as how I have lost my fust floor?'"

"What can the woman mean?" put in her Ladyship, with impatience.

"No offence, my lady: her lodger, she would say —Miss Brandon, as lodged with her a year, maybe."

"Miss Brandon lodge with Peachum! There must be some mistake; some one of the same name, perhaps."

"Not at all, my lady. The Doctor's niece, Miss Muriel, lodged there to take lessons, as she said, of some foreneerin' singing gentleman, Count —— I forget his name."

"A most extraordinary story, certainly. And who was with her, Flimsey?"

"No one, my lady; she was alone."

"Alone!" and a gleam of joy shot through the otherwise kind heart of the Baroness; "and Dr. Petersham, did he know of this—this escapade of his niece?"

"The Doctor was very angry with the young lady, and—and—I ask your Ladyship's pardon for naming such a thing."

"Go on, pray," said her mistress, impatiently.

"Well, and so, my lady, Mrs. Peachum not exactly liking such goings on in her house—for, my lady, it seems as how the Count come there every day—give the young lady warning; and she, —she, my lady—as imperent as maybe, actilly goes off that day week with the foreneerin' fella, bag and baggage."

"Married, of course," added Lady de Lisle, with a look of horror—not, however, unmingled with a certain sense of relief.

"Well, that's as maybe, my lady; but Mrs. Peachum fears not."

"Very terrible for poor Petersham. That will do, Flimsey; you may go."

"Your Ladyship will not require your hair brushed to-night?"

"No, my head aches; I shall go to bed at once."

"Wretched, foolish, unfortunate young creatnre," thought the lady, with some touch of real kindness now that all danger to her boy was at an end. "Good heavens! what an escape my darling has had!"

Next day the Baroness went to town, not willing to write to her son till she had communicated personally with Peachum, whom she knew to be both truthful and good-hearted. It is needless to say that the worst was confirmed: Muriel had gone off, it was supposed, to Italy, with the Count Waldemar Costesca, accompanied only by an Italian waiting woman hired for the occasion. This intelligence was gathered by much cross-questioning from the good Peachum, who shed, during the course of her

narrative, many a tender drop of pity over the folly and sad fate of the pretty young lady.

The Baroness now could no longer doubt; she therefore wrote that evening from Mivart's (the house in Park Lane having been dismantled for the winter) that decisive letter, which had been so ardently longed for, and so unavoidably delayed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DISCOVERY.

It is gala night at the Pergola, which is illuminated *a giorno* in honour of the visit of the Grand Ducal party, and to *fête* the arrival of the hereditary prince, the young Archduke Ferdinando, with his lovely bride, at the court of Florence. The ladies are of course *en grande toilette* — such white arms and statuesque shoulders of alabaster as gleam from each well filled tier of boxes; such sheen of silk, such flashing of bright gems and still brighter eyes, may well dazzle and bewilder the beholder, and cause the pretty, but not particularly well kept little theatre, to glow and sparkle with more than wonted brilliance. The house is crowded to the ceiling, the audience animated and in the best of humours, for in addition to the attraction offered by the first representation of the Favorita, the Albrandoni most appropriately taking the *rôle* of the *favorite*, Ferraris is

likewise announced to dance in the ball scene of the opera. Amalia Ferraris, the queen of Ballerine, whose every movement is fraught with the undulating grace of the serpent, the languid and voluptuous abandon of the bayadere of the East. 'Tis the very poetry of motion, the lightness of the zephyr, with the agility of the fawn—not that Ferraris ever indulges in those spasmodic leaps, those painful contortions of limb so usual with the *danseuses* of the modern school, which said bounds, twirls, and bounces we consider far better suited to the gymnasium or circus, than to the operatic stage. With her the fairy feet appear scarcely to touch the ground, and as you watch them thread the maze of the most intricate and flexible steps, she seems Terpsichore herself, the chorographic muse, descended from the halls of Apollo, so refined, so modest, so exquisitely graceful is our prime favourite, Amalia Ferraris.

The Italians have a bad habit of introducing the ballet between the acts of an opera, thereby interrupting and materially damaging a good performance. In compliment to the Albrandoni and her compeer, the great Dupréz, this custom had been waived during their engagement, but now, the Favorita being

an opera, with a ballet interwoven in the story, all was *en régle,* and expectation was at its acme. One only contretemps had occurred; placards had been posted all over the walls adjacent to the theatre and within the lobbies, to this effect—"The great French tenor, Mons. G. Dupréz, being seriously indisposed, is unavoidably prevented from undertaking the *rôle* of Fernando; the indulgence of the audience is therefore entreated in behalf of the tenor comprimario, who has kindly undertaken the part of Fernando at a moment's notice."

"Bravo," exclaimed Prince Fiesole, "now we shall be able to applaud our *primo secondo tenore,* the hero of the Café Doney."

"Ah," said another dilettante in the omnibus box, "he who wanted to back the Albrandoni against the English fair one with the golden locks opposite."

"*Amor di dio!*" said another *lion,* "it would be a near go; for if miladi there is more perfect in form and feature, La Gisellina—using the pretty Italian diminutive—is infinitely more *simpatica*; —but here she comes."

"Brava! brava!" and a round of applause commencing, as etiquette required, in the royal box,

was kept up so long that it appeared it never would end.

Gisella looked perfectly bewitching in her tasteful Spanish costume of the court of Alfonso of Castille, her brown tresses looped up with pearls, her pearly teeth looking like another row still more regular and delicately white, as she opened her rosy lips with a delicious smile, and after leaning tenderly a moment on her lover, commenced the first charming duet "Ah, mio bene." Gisella, since we first assisted at her *debût*, now a month since, has made wonderful progress in *aplomb*; all her stage fright has disappeared, and she treads the boards with the grace and ease, but without the mannerism, of a veteran actress. Her genius, no longer beclouded and paralysed with timidity, now shone forth in all its glorious beauty, so that even the great Dupréz, the most *difficile*, and at the same time appreciative of critics, had been heard to affirm that of the many *prime donne* of celebrity he had seen, he had rarely, if ever, until now, met one equally good in tragedy and comedy—unusual praise from one who never flattered, and whose own standard of excellence was so highly placed that he might echo the words of the poet—

"The space between th' ideal of man's soul
And man's achievement, who hath ever past!
An ocean spreads between us and that goal
Where anchor ne'er was cast."

The opera progressed much to the satisfaction of the noble and distinguished assemblage, the tenor Comprimario filling very creditably the *rôle* of Fernando, De Bassini leaving nothing to be desired in his interpretation of that of the King. The *entrée en scene* of Amalia Ferraris was of course the signal for renewed plaudits and expressions of delight from the public. But we shall take the liberty of viewing the fascinating *danseuse* from the box of the Lady Guinever Beltravers, which, according to the prevailing custom in Italy, was crowded from the end of the first act with a succession of gentleman callers—

"And miladi," said Marchese Visconti, "what does she think of Leonora to-night?"

"Ah," replied Lady Guinever, "I am raving about Albrandoni; what sweetness in her voice, what charm of manner, what taste in dress. I have seen many an actress, but never a *lady* on the stage before."

"Pity," said Mr. Beltravers, "we have not Dupréz to-night."

"Yes," said Prince P——, one of the greatest musical authorities of Florence, and its most distinguished amateur—"but the tenor is not bad, his voice is fine, he has school, and sings with *anima*."

"Oh! but Prince, he can never replace Duprez."

"Certainly not miladi," agreed the Prince, smiling. "Of course, there can be no possible comparison between the greatest dramatic singer of his day and our friend here—unknown to fame."

"We are very fortunate in the ballet to-night, *caro mio*," said Prince Fiesole. "Ferraris is more pleasing to me than most dancers."

"You are too young, Peppino, to remember the Taglioni in her glory, as I do—the *diva, par excellence*."

"I am no judge, perhaps," said Mr. Beltravers; "but in London, when the celebrated *pas de quattre* was danced at Her Majesty's Theatre, with Cerito, Carlotta Grisi, Lucille Grahn, and Taglioni, I believe the palm was universally awarded to Carlotta Grisi."

"Ah, but," said Prince P——, "you forget that Taglioni was even then a little bit *passée*, while the others were young."

Just then a fresh invasion of the box necessitated,

according to the rules of Italian etiquette, a corresponding *sortie*, to make room for the new comers.

"Glentworth," whispered Lady Guinever to her brother; "what have you done with Sir Bonverie? he promised faithfully to join us here to-night."

"I left him at the hotel, Jennie."

"But he is coming?"

"Yes, later, I believe; but he is such an uncertain bird, you know. Besides, he's bothered about not getting his letters, or something or another."

And thus in pleasant chit-chat, the ear and eye at the same time enchanted, the evening wore away; but the curtain had dropped on the third act of the Favorita, ere Sir Bouverie de Lisle, dressed in the most faultless, because the most simple taste, entered, and placed himself at the back of the box, on the side occupied by the Lady Mildred, who, of course, had ceded the seat of honour facing the scene, to her sister, as being a married lady. The young man leaned listlessly against the door, his whole attitude betraying indifference, or, perhaps, we should rather say, an impatient weariness of spirit.

"He is annoyed," thought kind Lady Guinever, "to see Mildred always so surrounded with these butterflies—he can scarcely approach her. I must tell

the silly child to keep these Italians more at a distance." Then to Gerald; "Do come forward, Sir Bouverie. I shall never forgive you, if you do not see and admire our countrywoman, the *Albrandoni*, who really, to-night, is surpassing herself."

"Thanks, dear Lady Guinever, but I am perfectly well here. I am one of those curious fellows, who prefer to hear music without seeing the performers, for fear of losing my illusions."

"Ah! but in this case it is impossible to be *désillusionné*, for the Leonora of the night is so pretty, that it lends even an additional charm to her lovely voice; and then, she is such an actress! I feel quite proud that England has produced such talent."

"Well, Lady Guinever, I will do my best to get up a *furore* about your *protégé*, rather than risk falling in your good opinion;" and he dropped into a seat just vacated, which happened to be at the side of Lady Mildred, and therefore looking away from the stage. "And Beauty's queen," he added, gallantly, addressing his fair neighbour; "it appears that her devoted subjects increase every moment—there is no approaching her."

"Oh! what a thocking quith you are, Thir Bouverie," lisped the young lady, while Lady Guinever

smiled archly at her husband, as much as to say, "Ah, Charlie, didn't I tell you how the land lay?"

"And is the really English?" enquired the beauty, "and how ith it the hath a foreign name?"

But Sir Bouverie, *distrait*, did not make any reply, for the delicious music of the fourth act had commenced, and Gerald, whose soul was attuned to soft and tender melancholy, felt the entrancing sounds steal on his senses, as the refreshing dew on the parched and thirsty ground.

At length the rich, mellow tones of the Leonora of the evening are heard calling in accents of despair on her Fernando, her thrilling notes mingling with the saint-like and far-off strains of the brothers intoning the mass for the profession of a newly-made religious in the chapel of the convent, hard by. Gerald almost started, as that tender, pure, and sympathetic voice met his ear, so familiar did it seem, recalling as it were to his memory happy hours, flown, perhaps never to return—tones which, once heard, may never be forgotten, because they resemble in their sweetness, in their freshness of *timbre*, in the gush of soul which seems to flow from each melodious phrase, that voice—so loved—of one far, far away.

"Pshaw!" he said to himself, disgusted; "what

tricks does fancy play with us! absurd, to compare the grand and cultivated organ of the finished actress with the pretty warblings of an amateur!"

Nevertheless he listened, more and more entranced—dreaming, ever dreaming—the big tear-drop gathering in the full, soft eye of deepest violet.

The final duet has now commenced, and Gerald, who has become a perfect Italian scholar, hears almost with a shudder the terrible malediction pronounced by Fernando, the flower of chivalry, upon the perjured bride—the faithless mistress. Like the dirge of hopes departed for ever, sounded the wail of of the heart-broken Leonora; the pleading prayer of the desolate repentant one, sobbed, not sung, by the consummate *artiste*, till at last, fairly vanquished by his love, Fernando strains her, his ever beloved, to his true heart—forgiven, as the words *"io t'amo"* thrill through the house.

Gerald had covered his face with his hand, to hide an emotion of which he felt ashamed, till, moved by a sudden impulse, he rose and fixed his gaze on the scene, just as the *prima donna*, flinging back the monk's cowl which had concealed her features, her rich, brown hair now streaming in waves to her waist, had abandoned herself to the embrace of the at last

reconciled lover. Then rising, with a gesture of infinite grace she parted the streaming locks from her brow, and stood revealed, in all her glorious artistic beauty, to the enthusiastic and frantically-applauding audience. Gerald gazed, passing his hand before his eyes to clear away the mist which had obscured his sight. Again he gazed, and the pearly drops started to his brow. He gazed—oh, God! this time in despairing horror—a long, lingering look of utter woe—such a look as a lost soul might cast towards the gates of Paradise closing for ever for her. Alas! he saw before him—oh, horror of horrors! can it be, the one fair face for ever imprinted on his heart of hearts? Can it be—oh, misery! *it is*—IT IS, the familiar, the too fondly-loved face of Muriel Brandon! And around that graceful form, encircling the slender waist—and the sight burned like a hot iron into his brain—is the arm of the singing-master and pseudo-Count, Waldemar Costesca. Stunned, sick at heart, despairing, poor Gerald staggered from the box, and finding his way to the door of the theatre—he never knew how—was put into a cab by some official who recognised him, and thus was he taken to his hotel, where he awaked to find, arrived by an extraordinary late delivery, on the writing-table, the letter so long

delayed, now so little desired, from his mother, awaiting him. The sight of that loved writing, at that moment, perhaps saved him from madness, because it brought a flood of tears to his relief, like rain.

CHAPTER XXXII.

NO GREATER SORROW.

Oh! worse than death! indeed more cruel than the grave, are the pangs we feel when one in whom we have "garnered up our soul," one on the faith of whose truth and purity we would gladly have staked our life, has proved unworthy. Far, far worse than partings for long, long years, aye eternal, here below, is that severance of two souls we fondly hoped were knit together in that spiritual and perfect marriage which looks beyond the tomb to a holier union, blest by the smile of God for evermore. How terrible the awakening from the realm of the ideal! our illusions gone for ever! our idol fallen from the pedestal on which fond fancy had placed it, shivered to atoms, crumbling to dust at our very feet! our trust for ever shaken in all that is righteous, and true, and loving. Verily, to be justly "wroth with one we love, doth work like madness in the brain."

And this most acute pain, this bitter woe, was felt in all its intensity by the young man who sat, solitary and self-contained as to all outward demonstrations of grief, in his chamber at the hotel, on the banks of the Arno, the morning after that fatal night at the theatre.

Gerald, too, was of such a noble, trusting, unsuspicious nature, that his mother's letter *alone* could never have moved him to doubt his beloved, even for an instant—"No," he would have said in conscious pride, "*my* Muriel is incapable of such conduct; imprudent she may be—guilty, never! there must be some mistake, some cabal against my sweet one." And Gerald, by his own mighty will, would have moved heaven and earth to fathom the mystery, with his own strong arm would have warded away from his gentle dove the shafts of calumny. Neither would he have permitted the evidence of his senses alone to wrong his love, much and terrible as would have been the shock of seeing her with his own eyes on a public stage, because it would for ever have severed her life from his own—yet not even for that could that sterling nature have been brought to doubt the innocence, the angelic purity, of the playmate of his boyhood, the sister of his youth, the

maiden he had longed to call the wife of his bosom. But now, as he sat half-stunned, yet racked with mental agony, he could find not one loophole of escape; *he could not doubt*—there lay that terrible letter, with its fearful accusations, and burning still into heart and brain—the memory of the too convincing scene of last evening; no, the evidence is too clear, too damning; and Muriel, she whom he has loved, aye, and still loves with all the passion and fervour of a yet virgin heart, is now a thing to be loathed and avoided. Both must live on, and their hearts beat still with all the warmth and fire of youth, yet they are now, and must ever be, *dead* to each other.

"Oh, Muriel, Muriel! would God that I were kneeling by thy grave this very minute. Anything rather than this—oh, Muriel, Muriel!" and Gerald, vanquished by his despair, covered his face with both his hands, his whole frame shaken with the convulsive sobs which burst from that manly breast, whose lion heart was yet of a tenderness rarely to be met with even in woman.

"Bouverie," said a voice, after its owner had vainly tried to open the door, some hours later; "what, locked in, old fellow?"

"Oh! come in—is it you, Glentworth?" and he drew back the bolt from the door.

"Why, what on earth ails you, old chap? Too much of the jolly god, eh! Bouverie, my boy, this Italian liquor plays the very deuce with one. I never take it on principle. Always stick to port and sherry, with a sprinkling of champagne, and a good bottle of prime old Lafitte now and then, and you can get no great harm—but, I say, old fellow, what ails you to-day? you don't look yourself, upon my soul you don't."

"I am not quite well, Glentworth, but it is nothing. I dare say I shall be all right to-morrow."

"Then you don't dine to-day with Beltravers, eh?"

"Impossible, my dear fellow."

"Then I must give you Jennie's message at once. She says she is certain you are not quite the thing, as you left us so abruptly last night, and she recommends you not to mope so much in your room, but to come more to them, and she declares positively that Charlie never will walk unless you come to fetch him."

"Lady Guinever is too good to trouble herself

about me, and I am infinitely obliged to her; but a letter received yesterday from my mother will, I fear, oblige me immediately to leave for England."

"All well at home I hope; no bad news from Lady de Lisle?"

"No—yes—not exactly; really, Glentworth, my head aches so, you must excuse me."

"Willingly, old fellow—bye bye; go to bed early, like a good boy; take a seidlitz to morrow, and you will be all right"—going to the door—then turning back—"Oh, I forgot to tell you of a piece of good luck of mine. I am to-morrow to make the acquaintance of the charming little prima donna, at a supper party given by Fiesole."

"For God's sake," exclaimed Bouverie with sudden energy, starting up—"for God's sake, Glentworth, don't go."

"I declare, you are quite spasmodic, my dear friend, you alarm me—'don't go!' and, pray, why not?"

"Send an excuse, Glentworth—be advised."

"Send an excuse! what next? am I to be dictated to? ain't I out of leading strings yet?"

"Not that—not that; but yet——"

"Oh! no more preaching, Bouverie, for heaven's sake; one sermon a week may be swallowed, but one's enough for any reasonable man;" and the young marquis turned on his heel, whistling angrily the new bridal polka, composed for the wedding of the young Archduke and Duchess.

"And is it come to this!" moaned poor Gerald; "is she who was once all the world to me, she for whom I would have shed the last drop of my heart's blood, rather than that the breath of scandal should approach to poison her young life—is she now sunk so low as to be the jest of every titled coxcomb! the presiding genius at the midnight orgies of the members of the Jockey Club! Oh! that I could shield her at least from further shame, from deeper abasement!" Yes, though their paths might never more now be together, still he could hold out to her a succouring hand.

Thus, at last, did a ray of hope, however feeble, find its way into the dark chamber of his mind; 'twas but a glimmer, but when Hope has once entered, that grim and gloomy giant, black Despair, no longer reigns supreme. Oh! he would strain every nerve to save her from utter ruin. If there is

law or justice in the land, the poor deluded, wronged young creature should at least have a legal right to the protection and name of her seducer. Once a wife, low and wretched as the villain must be, he could not be so lost to all human feeling as not to insist that his wife should be respected. Alas! alas! that the day should dawn when he, the lover of her youth, should plot to see her married to another! Gerald walked to the bell, and rang it; the waiter appearing, enquired if milor' would take dinner?

"Dinner?" he had quite forgotten there was such a meal—dinner, indeed! as if with throat so parched, and tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, he could eat; he laughed at the idea, a bitter hysterical laugh, such as may be heard when the heart is saddest. "No dinner, good Girolamo. I am unwell—a little feverish, perhaps—a cup of tea will, I think, do me good."

"His Excellency would do well to see a doctor. I do not wish to frighten milor', but the *miliari* fever is about."

"Thank you, Girolamo; it is nothing so bad—a cup of tea, that's all, but make it strong."

"Anything with the tea, Excellency?" (This

waiter was a Neapolitan, and every one is your excellency there).

"Nothing, thank you; and, Girolamo, send the commissioner of the hotel to me immediately."

"*Eccellenza Si.*"

The waiter left to order the tea and the commissioner.

"Did your lordship send for me?" enquired the latter.

"Yes—go immediately to the Pergola, enquire at the stage entrance—I think it is there the addresses of the singers are kept—and bring me in writing the exact address of Mons. Dupréz (this by way of an excuse), and also of the Signorina Muriel—I mean the prima donna—Signorina Gisella Albrandoni."

"*Subito Signore.*"

"You will remember the names?"

"Certainly, milor'."

The man departed on his errand. Meanwhile, Gerald having managed to swallow the cup of execrable tea, paced the room like a caged lion, till the return of the commissioner.

In less than an hour Gerald's impatient, restless curiosity was satisfied. Where Mons. Dupréz lives

can, however, import but little to us—indeed we strongly suspect our hero himself never looked at his address; it sufficed for him to know that the Signorina Albrandoni resided about a mile from the city, at the Villino Santa Rosalia, *fuori la porta San Niccolo.*

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE INTERVIEW.

GERALD having previously given directions to his servant to be at the railway station with the luggage in order to take the direct train for England that same evening, left his hotel on foot to perform his contemplated pilgrimage of love and duty. The day had been one of unusual mildness for the season—milder, indeed, than it often is in summer in our less genial clime—and the sun, now drawing down towards the horizon, had enveloped the western heavens in a glory of crimson and gold. It was, besides, one of the numerous fête-days so common in Italy, and L'ung' Arno was still thronged with promenâders on foot, or in their elegant equipages. On such days the whole population is abroad, the very door steps are crowded, each family or group of friends gesticulating and talking loudly to one another. Gerald, whose soul was but ill attuned to

mirthfulness, passed over as swiftly as might be to the opposite and quieter side of the Arno, across the *Ponte alla Carraja*, then through the narrow back streets to the *Porta San Niccolo*. Past the archway the road here becomes more rural; you now may meet with peasants with bundles of wood on their heads, or driving low waggons drawn by panting goaded oxen. Here you may observe the black-eyed *contadine* filling their antique-shaped vases with water at the marble fountain, and afterwards balancing them as they return homeward, each on her classic head, like so many statues. As Gerald passed on, many a dark-browed damsel greeted the handsome Signor *forestiere* with a cordial *Buona sera,* accompanied with a joyous Italian smile, and many a peasant returning to his dwelling doffed his straw hat to him, a sign of respect always most courteously acknowledged by our young patrician. Gerald passed onward till he reached the green turning to the right, which he had by dint of various enquiries, and notwithstanding much contradictory evidence, at last ascertained to be the road to the *Villino Santa Rosalia.* A pretty little cottage it appeared, gleaming white upon the summit of a gentle eminence, nestling amid a trellis-work of vines.

Lithe and active as a young leopard, accustomed from infancy to chase the deer on the hills of Scotland, and with step so firm and breath so long as to out-distance even the practised chamois hunter of the Alps, how was it that in scaling this gentle slope the heart of the young man beat so fast and thick, that he was more than once forced to stop to relieve his labouring chest? The path was winding, and concealed from the inmates of the cottage by shrubs and vineplants, our pedestrian, therefore, mounted leisurely, seemingly desirous of gaining time and composure. At length the summit is reached, and Gerald stands beneath the porch pulling a bell, which appeared to be both cracked and out of order. A second, and a third pull, and then a shuffling step is heard within, accompanied by the grumbling tones of an old woman's voice, calling on all the saints and the Madonna, and coughing between each expletive.

"Good mother," questioned the visitor, "does the Signora Albrandoni live here?"

"The master is out," mumbled the old crone, and was about to bang the door in the visitor's face, when placing his hand against it, he said—

"But my business, my good woman, is with the lady."

"Madonna mia!" screeched the old crone, "the Signorina never sees any visitors."

"But I *must* see her," persisted Gerald; "I am a friend—a countryman."

"*Pazienza* Signore, the Signorina will see no one."

Perceiving words to be greatly misplaced, Gerald bethought him of a more convincing argument, and quietly drawing from the pocket of his waistcoat a small and glittering gold coin, he slipped it into the hard and horny palm of the *donna di facenda*, saying with decision—

"Now, mother, I will go myself and find the Signorina," and putting her aside, he at once passed into the cottage, leaving the astonished old woman to cross herself again and again as she invoked the blessing of the Madonna and all the saints upon the head of the handsome and charitable *Signore Inglese*. Nor did the intruder wander far, for the Villino was not large; the first room he entered was apparently the dining-room, as a light repast was there served of ripe fruit, cream cheese, and fresh brown bread. He passed through rapidly to the next apartment, which opened into a verandah, commanding a fine and extensive view of Florence, with her domes and

steeples, the blue Appenines in the far distance. Now, however, the short twilight (as is the case in southern latitudes) had closed in rapidly, but the moon had arisen and was flooding the chamber with her silver radiance. Dazzled at first by the light, or blinded, maybe, by the mist which an emotion beyond control had brought unbidden to his eye, Gerald did not at the first glance perceive a slight and girlish figure on the balcony, seated on a low stool, a large music book on her knee, which she appeared to be studying by the moonlight, which almost enveloped her, shedding a halo around the graceful head and bending form. The young girl seems intently occupied, so much so, that she does not even turn her face towards the intruder, merely remarking gently and with abstraction—

"So soon returned, Count? and is Dupréz well enough to sing to-morrow night, or are we again to divide our triumphs?"

Well was it for Gerald's resolve, well for the proud race of de Lisle, that Muriel (for it is she) had named the Count—had addressed him as if master there; had, as it were, recognised the right of that man, and him alone, to enter unannounced to invade her privacy, to intrude uninvited and un-

reproved on the seclusion of her evening hours. Well, indeed, we repeat that it was so, for the softness of his loving nature was already stealing to his eyes, and had not the name—the detested name—of the Count fallen on his ear, who knows whether the high resolve might not have melted as the summer dew-drop?—who can tell whether he would have performed his hard duty to himself, to his mother, to her? But the fatal word had operated like a charm, and the young man stood there stern, cold, haughty; all his mother's proud scorn in the curl of the chiselled lip, his arms folded, head erect, pale, he stood looking in the moonbeams like a giant statue hewn in stone. Having received no reply, Muriel turned her face, to find, not the Count —but—was it an apparition?—she had read of such things, and she shrieked in terror.

"Miss Brandon!"

Then it was no spirit, but himself bodily, her friend, her brother, perhaps even now promised to another; but what matter?—if he still remembered his little Muriel.

"Gerald! Gerald!" and this time with a cry of joy. She sprang towards him — she caught his arm. "Once again! once again!—oh, what happiness!"

But coldly withdrawing his hand, for the demon of cruel jealousy and pride had now got possession of his breast, and he had vowed to steel his heart against the blandishments of the comedian. Then in a forced voice—so calm, so frigid, it seemed as if not he, but another spóke, he said—

"I do not come here to reproach you, unhappy girl, but, if possible, to save you. God only knows the profound pity I feel for you, lost, abandoned, sunk as you are, down, down to the very dust! would that I might—" and here his voice had lost some of its steadiness—"would that I could have shielded you with my life! but now, as it is——"

"Oh, Gerald!" sobbed the poor girl, "cruel! Oh, if you knew how lonely, how wretched I was, deserted, forsaken by all!"

"Not by me, Muriel, the playmate of your childhood, the brother of your youth, would never have forsaken you—forsakes you not even now." Muriel, who had leaned her hand on the arm of a sofa near, now sank to the ground at the young man's feet, her hands clasped, her bright brown hair no longer fastened by the comb—which had fallen to the ground—falling in masses around her. Lovely she looked in very sooth, but Gerald turned from her

almost in disgust, muttering between his teeth the abhorred word "Actress!"

"Forgive, oh, Gerald, only forgive your unhappy Muriel, and she will quit the stage for ever. Oh! how hateful it is to me now—indeed, indeed, it is—believe me."

"I do forgive you, Muriel, as I hope for mercy; and as these may be the last words we ever utter to each other in this world, (for henceforth our paths will be wide apart, as pole from pole, and you will henceforth be to me as one dead,) I will add, that I have loved you with a passion and fervour, aye, and a fidelity too, rare in man, and," he added, with bitterness, "I fear *impossible* in woman—but hear me to the end"—(as she raised her tearful eyes, smilingly, as a gleam of sunshine in a storm)—"hear me swear to you, unhappy girl, that by so much as I once loved you, so is the measure, by which I now *loathe* and abhor the very sight of that traitor face, so false, so beautiful!"

"Oh, God!" moaned poor Muriel, bewildered, "and I, have I not said I would quit the stage for ever?"

"The stage; shameless and deceitful that

you are! it is not to the profession you have chosen—(hateful as it is to me)—that I now allude."

"What then can you mean?"

"Is it possible—so young, so peerless, and yet so abandoned? I shall soon lose all patience. With whom did you fly from England—from home? Who lives even now in this very house—answer me that? And you cannot, I fear me, you dare not tell me you are a wife; that you have the sanction of a husband's name and protection, for this insane folly."

"Sir Bouverie," said Muriel, rising to her feet—offended and hurt—"I am at a loss to imagine to whom, or to what you allude."

"Good heavens! and is it possible—to have become, so quickly, so entirely lost to all sense of right? Answer me, Muriel, are you, or are you not married to this music master, this Costesca?"

"Married!" echoed the girl, a smile, proud and scornful as his own, curling her lip. "No, Sir Bouverie, I am not; and, now permit me to ask you, in my turn, what imports it to you, the promised husband of the Lady Mildred St. Aubyn,

whether I become the wife of Count Costesca or not ?"

"What imports it ?—the girl will drive me mad—what imports it ?—that I should at least know you to be in a respectable position, instead of what is courteously termed a *doubtful* one, and to further this end alone is what brings me here to-night. Mark me ! I feared that man had not made you a wedded wife; and I came with the express intention of shooting him, shooting him, I say, like a cur, if he refused to do his duty by you."

"Indeed !" said Muriel, ironically; "I fancy the Count can manage his own affairs as well without the assistance of even Sir Bouverie de Lisle; do you suppose he would not be too happy to share the triumphs and salary of Gisella Albrandoni ?"

"Oh ! silence, Muriel, silence, make not a boast of your shame, or if you do, at least spare me the wretchedness of hearing it; and oh ! may the day never dawn, which will see you weep tears of agony—over the memory of this our long, our eternal farewell ! May you never, when too late, discover how to appreciate a heart too true—even to have dreamed of falsehood in you ! Farewell then," and here all his firmness gave way, and sobs choked his

utterance. "Fare-thee-well, my only love, for ever in this world; form other ties, and be happy, if you can, in the love of one who will, I trust, know how to appreciate the treasure he has stolen; and, oh! if you ever call to mind, months, years, hence, the brother—alas! the lover of your youth—remember how his last words were—I forgive you, Muriel, as I hope to be forgiven—remember that with his parting words, he called down a blessing on your head."

Thus saying, he opened his arms, and Muriel sprang to that strong and manly breast, as a young dove to her nest, and grew there; but Gerald gently disengaged those clinging hands, and pressing one kiss on the glossy hair, gently laid the half-fainting girl on the couch, and hastily quitting the apartment and the house, passed out into the starlit night.

Muriel would have recalled him; she tried to shriek the beloved name, but the parched lips refused to form a sound. She sat gazing, as in a night-mare, on the spot where last she had beheld that form, ever loved—now adored—idolized, worshipped—infinitely dearer now, because for ever lost. Then she rose madly to fly after him—too

late, too late—poor heart, Gerald is far, far away; and Muriel, whose trembling limbs sink beneath their fragile burden, is borne to her bed senseless in the arms of the Count Costesca.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DEAD TO ME.

VARIOUS were the surmises, numerous the conjectures of Florentine society, when the unexpected departure of Sir Bouverie de Lisle for England, simultaneously with the sudden illness and subsequent cessation of the engagement of the Albrandoni, became bruited abroad.

For some days Sir Bouverie's absence was believed to be only temporary, and the indisposition of the prima donna slight, but later, when the former returned not, and the latter was officially announced so dangerously ill as to preclude the possibility of her resuming her public duties for the present, then it was that the Jockey Club lost themselves in conjectures, and Doney was taxed to the utmost to supply a sufficiency of ices to assist his *habitués* in fathoming the double mystery.

"I don't for my part believe in the sudden indisposition of singers," said Count Neri; "*che!* there must be something else in the wind."

"*Che!* nor I," said Visconti, "more probable that other tenor her lover has beaten her, because she got more applause than he did."

"Or a better engagement, perhaps, offered," suggested another, "in London, Paris, or Vienna; *chi sa?* These singers are all *canaglia; virtuosi candglia,* you know, we call them."

"This one, however, is, I am told, a lady both by birth and education," put in Prince Fiesole, "and has offended her family by going on the stage."

"Romantic nonsense! *Che!* so you believe in princesses in disguise, Fiesole *mio?*"

"I believe," replied the prince, "the Signorina Albrandoni to be a well-conducted modest young person. I can vouch that she peremptorily refused the supper party I would have made for her."

"*Che, che!*" exclaimed several jockeys, "all jealousy—that lover of hers locked her up, depend upon it."

The Prince shrugged his shoulders; "as you please, my friends, but what say you to the flight of the Englishman?"

"Heartless, leaving the beautiful *Sposina* to wear the willow."

"That is just those English," said Prince P——; "all of them crazy—walking out as they do in the midday sun without even an umbrella, despising everything out of their own country—climbing mountains at the risk of their lives, when they might take things easily in a comfortable carriage."

"Yes," added a Neapolitan Duca, "and actually going down the crater of Vesuvius. *Sono tutti pazzi quest' Inglesi!*" Having given this sapient opinion, the young man proceeded to finish his tumbler of *ponche à la romaine.*

"But," suggested Marchese Visconti, "Sire Bouverie may have left for family affairs."

"The illness of a relative, for instance," put in another.

"Whatever may be the reason," suggested a third, "it concerns us far less than the loss of our *simpatica* little prima donna, whose engagement I am truly vexed to learn is at an end."

"But is this really so?" enquired one or two anxious listeners.

"I regret to inform you, signori," said Prince P——, one of the proprietors of the theatre, "that

the Albrandoni's medical attendant informs us the young lady's state of health is such as gives him grave reason to fear for her life. I need not now add that any hope of her again singing for us this season, would prove utterly vain."

And thus, while these butterflies of the passing hour are babbling, in very idleness, of that of which they know nothing, Gerald is pursuing his voyage, a prey to that sombre grief, that bitter disappointment, from which, its poignancy once over, the youthful dreamer awakes transformed, as it were, the glorious light of youth departed for aye, the very heavens receding, the dark shadows closing in upon the soul, till past fancies and past illusions have all melted into the clear obscure of common day, and the generous trusting boy has become at last the hard, selfish, unbelieving worldling; unless indeed, he happily loses in this refining fire all the dross of his nature, and so comes forth refulgent, for the battle of life, a wiser and a better, if a sadder, man.

But we do not intend to take more than a casual glimpse at the young heir of the de Lisles, in his hasty flight over snow-capped mountains, by the iron way, and the stormy sea, to his own much-loved

home, where we may be sure that with all a woman's tact and a mother's tenderness, Lady de Lisle, in anticipating her son's every wish, and in studiously avoiding each subject likely to open afresh the wound which had pierced so deeply into his life, had discovered the safest and surest way, sooner or later, to a radical cure. Once and once only was the name of Muriel mentioned between them, and that was by Gerald's own seeking.

"Mother," he had said, as one evening in the solemn twilight they sat together in the quiet oratory, with its dark oriel window, "I would wish you to know the particulars of my last meeting, or rather parting, from Muriel Brandon. I wish to tell you that in bidding her an eternal adieu—she being then to me as one dead—I considered I was not wanting in faith to you, my mother, if I confessed to her my love—as a thing of the past;" he added, "that at the same time he had urged upon the unhappy girl the necessity of an immediate marriage with her betrayer, and he begged his mother to believe that his one sole desire now was to be sure such marriage had taken place, or were likely to do so, and then he thought he should be comparatively happy."

Lady de Lisle silently pressing her son's hand as a

sign that she accepted the excuse urged by him, at the same time assured him she would do all in her power to discover if such marriage had occurred or were probable; and there the subject dropped between them.

The Baroness later endeavoured to turn her son's attention to politics; it was her darling project that Sir Bouverie should be returned in Parliament as the Conservative member for his county; her passionate desire that he should enter the arena, and make himself a name, as an orator, a political economist, she cared not what; ambition was this woman's foible, and it being denied to her sex, the aims and honours to which her soul aspired, she resolved to reach them in the person of her only son, and therefore left no stone unturned, no plan untried to gain her object.

Meanwhile our unhappy Muriel lay wavering between life and death for many weeks. The shock to her nerves had been too great; the sight of one whom (unknown to herself) she had ever loved, for those few moments of agony, the alternate rapture of knowing how he had loved *her*, and the despair of hearing that familiar voice declare that henceforth she, though warm with life, and youth, and love, was

now and for ever to be to him as *one dead.* How those fatal words *dead to me!* weighed on her heart cold and chill as the stone on the sepulchre; and were they not rendered yet more terrible too, by the consciousness of what might have been, by futile regrets, over the irrevocable? Oh! that unrestrained by a false pride, when he had made against her that cruel, that most unjust accusation, why had she not flung herself on her knees before him, and declared her innocence; surely his heart would have pleaded her cause—he would no longer have believed her guilty.

All these thoughts and more, came crowding upon her when first she awoke to consciousness, and the bitter memory of the past swept, as a flood, through heart and brain. The watchers were frightened then at the paroxysm which ensued, for Muriel arose, white as alabaster, her eyes fixed and glaring on vacancy, as shriek after shriek rent the air, and echoed through the house; she tore handfuls of her dishevelled tresses, and laughed to see them fall around her; she flew at all who tended her, refusing food and medicine—she *would* die, she declared, why did they prevent her? At length the violence of her despair brought its own remedy.

"A vein had burst, and her sweet lips, pure dyes,
Were dabbled with the deep blood which ran o'er,
And her head drooped as when the lily lies
O'ercharged with rain."

And thus she lay for hours, days, weeks, as one dead—happy, may be, for her had her awakening been in worlds beyond the grave; happier, perhaps, but not more wholesome, for is not this world a school—a preparation to fit us for our eternal home?

CHAPTER XXXV.

WEDDED.

"And how long, cruel and unkind, will you still keep me in suspense?—how long condemn me to drag on a wretched and lonely existence?" These words were uttered one balmy noon in the sweet Italian spring time, as the speaker hung over the couch of the lovely invalid, whom, with untiring anxiety, he had watched through long, weary months of sickness, when the flickering flame of life seemed well nigh spent; and then onward through a lengthened and at times almost hopeless convalescence. Tenderly had he nursed her, with a gentleness foreign to his hard and selfish nature, and now he was rewarded in that the delicate cheek again wore a tint of rose, though of the palest, and the eye had brightened once more with a healthful light. Languidly she reposed on her couch, which had

been wheeled to the window, that she might enjoy the extended view, and draw new life from the soft, fragrant breath of the tepid air, in this season laden with the intoxicating perfume of the orange blossom. He hung over her, as she lay with closed eyes, the dark silken lashes reposing on the sunken cheek, the blue meandering veins too plainly visible beneath the transparent skin of the temples, and of the poor wasted hands, patiently awaiting a word, a look; for he loved that pale, suffering girl, as entirely as such a nature was capable of loving, and longed to call her his bride.

"Speak to me, *amica mia*, if but one word—even though it be in the negative. Oh! how much longer must I plead in vain! Does not my love merit even a reply!"

She slowly unclosed her eyes, and fixed them on the face of her lover:

"You have been most kind, most devoted to me, my friend, at a time, too, when I so much needed sympathy. Believe, oh! believe me, I am not so ungrateful as you imagine."

"Gratitude alone, *vita mia*, is but a cold and barren word, which can never satisfy the heart which hungers for something better."

"Alas! alas! and what more have I to bestow? My heart is dead and cold within my breast."

"It will revive, dearest—revive, for your own happiness, and the supreme bliss of others."

"Ah!—never, never!—all is over for me on earth!"

"Say not so, sweet lady. Have not you still your art?—are you not young, beautiful, talented?—you will yet live to be the first of our modern queens of song."

"Never, Count, will I again tread the boards of a public stage,—never, even should I regain my voice; but that, believe me, is gone for ever."

"Say not so, Gisella—Muriel——"

"Oh! not that name!—in pity, do not let me hear it!" pettishly putting her hands to her ears: "when last I heard the name MURIEL, it was" (lowering her voice to a whisper) "spoken by the lips of the *living dead*—he who lies buried in the grave of all my hopes with the memories of the past. You look at me, my friend, but this is not madness; I am in my right senses. Call me Gisella, then; I will know, henceforth, no other name."

"Then, dearest,—dearest Gisella!—you bid me hope?"

She passed her hand over her eyes for a moment, in order to collect her scattered thoughts. "Yes," she reflected, "I am still young; life's pulses again throb in my veins; my heart, in the midst of all this glorious nature, pines for affection. Can I love this man? Alas! no. Yet, he alone, of all living things, stood beside my bed when others had forsaken me; he, alone, in my desolation deserted me not;—and shall I coldly turn away from the only creature who would have smoothed my dying pillow, and wiped the death-drops from my brow? God forbid!"—and then the sweetness of self-sacrifice, for the sake of one to whom she owed so much, filled all her woman's soul:—"And if I cannot expect happiness for myself, will it not, at least, be sweet to make the happiness of another?" —and now a brilliant smile, the smile of the olden time, illumined for a moment her features, and her resolution was taken. "Costesca," she said, and her eyes, so full of expression as she spoke, had in them a beseeching—almost a piteous look,—"Costesca, you have asked me to become your bride. I cannot do so, till I have treated you with perfect frankness. I loved—I love another, now lost to me for ever, and in accepting you as my husband, I am

but obeying *his* behest; he has shewn me how, that in flying with you from England (God knows how innocently!), and still more, by residing in an apartment under the same roof with yourself, I have incurred the censure of the world, and blighted for ever my reputation,—nay, hear me out," as her companion made a gesture of dissent,—"I have been foolish, imprudent, mad, but guilty—never! Well, he misjudged me; sided with the unkind world, and bid me become your wife. But I could not have done so, even at his bidding, had I not hoped —nay, felt certain—that in wedding you I might, at least, secure your happiness: you have been more than father, mother, brother, to me, my friend; and if the devotion of a life can repay you—if a blighted heart be found worthy your acceptance—take it, and with it this hand,—it is yours, to take or resign, as you think fit."

"Resign it! Oh, my treasure! rather let me press this fairy hand to my lips, and on my knees express the rapture, the intense joy, you have given me!"

But Muriel heard and suffered the transports of her accepted suitor as in a dream,—no response in her heart, no echo in her soul,—his touch awakened

no electric chord in her frame; like the far-off murmur of the distant brook sounded the tender accents of the soft southern tongue, breathed by unloved lips, as the shadow of a substance never to be attained—the very mockery of a grief such as hers seemed this vapid, passionless betrothal; their souls had ever been wide apart, yet never were they so widely severed as now, when hand is joined in hand, and the lips have uttered the sweet promise—so dear to true lovers—that henceforth and for ever each will live only for the other. The very perfume of the orange groves—the fond carol of the bird cheering his tender mate on her nest—the voluptuous breath of early spring—all were now unheeded, or rather, only served to augment the bitterness of the present, contrasted with what might have been, had *another*, in this earthly Paradise, breathed into her entranced ear vows of eternal constancy. Ah! that *might have been*—is it not about the saddest sentence in our mortal vocabulary? Let us quickly pass over this, under such circumstances, most unsatisfactory period of courtship. Day followed day, and night was added unto night, ere the drooping invalid could gain sufficient strength to render it possible for her to fulfil her

engagement; it is probable, indeed, that a deep-rooted reluctance she scarce dare own to herself was at the bottom of this delay; for the mind exercises a mighty influence, for ill or for good, over her material partner—and with a soul ill at ease it is rare to find the mortal tenement healthful and strong. Poor Muriel was a prey to that lassitude which supervenes after past excitement, when memory luxuriates in dreams of the irrevocable past, and, like hope, colours all with a brighter tint. In memory's sad perspective, then do looks beam with still deeper tenderness, words take a more melodious accent, and the presence of the loved one, though absent, becomes an eternal reality; and as we awake to the fatal conviction, that henceforth we have no interest in life,—no hope to sustain us,—Ah! then how does the dreary routine of daily existence fret and oppress our very soul—how does even the sight of some people irritate our nerves, so that we can scarce support their view!—nature itself, indeed, appears enveloped, as it were, in a pall.

At length, however, youth, and a sound constitution triumphed, and Gisella Albrandoni (for by such name alone she would be known), well in health, though still pale and attenuated, gave her hand to

Signor Waldemar Costesca—no Count, after all, but the son of a respectable music master of Naples. The wedding, at the request of the bride, was most private; and her husband bore her off at once to Milan, Venice, Naples, Palermo, where he had professional engagements, hoping the change might completely restore her to health—indeed, he spent half his salary in consulting physicians, with a view to recovering the lost voice of the young *prima donna*. But she, poor child! faded like a flower bereft of light and warmth;—for the woman had discovered, when too late, the maiden's fatal mistake; and had found, by bitterest experience, that to natures susceptible as hers, there can be no medium in marriage between the bliss of the angel and the tortures of the demon.

END OF PART SECOND.

PART III.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SHIPWRECK.

Oh! the restless rolling ocean, flashing, sighing, moaning for evermore; now reflecting as in crystal mirror the azure heavens; now black and turbid beneath the gloom of the thunder cloud; at dawn sleeping peacefully as a new born infant at its mother's breast, at eve lashed with angry fury by the maddened winds; now glowing in the glories of the departing sun like molten gold, anon glancing, as if on fire, with phosphoric light in the foam wake of the noble steamer.

And thou, tideless sea of Italy, ever beauteous Mediterranean! who may view for the first time thy sapphire wave without emotion? who, after long years, may revisit thy mountain-bound shores fringed

with their groves of orange and olive, where the myrtle and palm grow in wild luxuriance, and not live once over again the romance, the loves, the sorrows of his youth? And if we, the stranger and foreigner, wear thee, O Italia, in our heart of hearts, what wonder if thy dark-browed sons would die for thee that thou mightest become once more a queen among the nations?

Gisella, or rather Muriel, for *we* would know her by none other name, the six months wife, sat with her husband on the deck of one of the fine steamers which make the direct passage from Naples to Marseilles, without touching at any port; the day, their first at sea, had been lovely, but the sun had gone down red and angry, and the wind had now freshened and was whistling through the shrouds.

The Captain, in passing them, had in reply to the lady's question as to the weather, said he thought it might be an ugly night, and added that he did not intend to turn in till late, if at all. The ship's motion soon after became so unpleasant, that Muriel, by no means a good sailor, expressed to her husband her desire of going down before the sea became rougher, and the pitching of the steamer more violent.

"You must get some one else to take you, *chère amie*. I have enough to do to take care of myself," he replied, somewhat sulkily.

"And are you then such a very bad sailor?"

"Bad sailor! I only wish to Heavens I had never entered this cursed ship."

The poor young wife looked at her husband in dismay, not understanding this caprice on his part.

"I am truly sorry, Waldemar, you suffer so from sea sickness. I would not have proposed, had I known it, to come this way."

"Sea sickness indeed, that is bearable, though bad; but this risk of life is horrible—horrible!"

"But my own life—if there is danger—is perilled as well as yours; we shall die at least together."

"Thank you," —ironically—"a pleasant consolation when one is drowned like a dog."

"Who talks of drowning?" said the Captain's cheery voice, "we are not a going to Davy Jones's yet a while; but here, madam, take my arm; let me give you in charge to the stewardess. Hold firm, we must not allow the winds of heaven, as the poet says, to visit such a sweet young face too roughly. Excuse me, my dear, but I have a daughter at home about your age; now good night, sleep well, and

pleasant dreams," and the kind hearted bluff sailor surrendered his charge, like a drooping lily, to the care of the fat fussy female attendant.

The wind blew hard all that night, and the morning dawned, if dawn it could be called, murky, dusk, and drear, the horizon appearing like a sheet of lead, while alternate showers of rain, sleet, and hail accompanied each storm gust. Sickness was the order of the day, and most of the passengers kept to their couches, yet none,—unless we except the truly wretched Costesca and one or two nervous females—thought of peril. But towards the middle of the next night it came on to blow a perfect hurricane; the roar of the tempest was awful, sea after sea struck the noble ship till she trembled in all her framework, and stood for a moment perfectly still as the waters poured over her from stem to stern like a cataract (she had scarcely made five knots in the twenty-four hours), till after a pause, and with a violent effort, the brave ship would again battle with the storm like a giant struggling in the coil of a serpent. But the wind blew with such severity, the waves leaped over the steamer in such quick succession and with such tremendous force that the ship now laboured painfully, groaning and

creaking in all her timbers. At about four o'clock A.M. a fearful sea struck her, and, washing away the covering which protected the machinery, it poured down through the hatches into the engine room like a flood, putting out all the fires. Then it was that Captain Palmer came down to reassure the alarmed passengers, and at the same time to beg them to dress, in order that they might be prepared for any extremity.

Meanwhile a tarpaulin had been nailed over the open hatchway, but such was the force of the wind and the violence of the sea, that three such coverings, one after another, were washed away, and with them the ships carpenter and his assistant. The steamer now lay like a log in the trough of the sea, but all hands were ordered to the pumps, the heavy portion of the cargo thrown overboard, and such sail set as could be borne in such a storm. Again Captain Palmer came down to the cabin, and with serious, anxious face, but unfaltering voice, told the passengers that his only hope now lay in the moderating of the wind, adding that then, under Providence, the approach of another ship might save their lives. And now arose cries and shrieks of despair frightful to hear.

Muriel, timid and fearful to a degree under small annoyances, in this supreme moment showed a courage remarkable for her years and sex. Pale, composed, erect, yet murmuring a prayer for strength, she moved a ministering angel amongst the weaker of her sister sufferers, giving to one her smelling salts, to another a few drops of cordial, to all a cheering word. No more sea sickness now, for the shadow of a great terror has psychologized their minds, and all minor miseries are no longer felt. Nor did Muriel omit in her ministrations him who should in that hour have proved her main earthly stay and consolation, her husband,—but he lay supine in all the agonies of a grovelling fear, muttering alternate moans and curses. After vainly endeavouring to instil into that coward heart a little of her own fortitude, the young wife left him to his wretchedness, with a shudder of uncontrollable disgust; verily their souls are for ever disunited now.

There was a clergyman on board—it imports little of what denomination, suffice it to us that he was a holy man of God—he had congregated the people together for prayers, when beholding that young creature so lovely, so brave, he smilingly said to her—"You then have no fear of death, dear sister?"

"Life," she answered, sadly, "holds out but few attractions to me. I am ready to go, should God so will it; the pang will be short, if sharp, and I believe in His love and trust in His mercy."

She kneeled now with the weeping women and wailing children, and many a stifled groan burst from manly breasts in that dark hour. The man of God prayed with fervour. "Oh God, may those who have never thought before now realize Thy presence!—may those who have as yet lived in sinful forgetfulness of the hereafter, now at death's very portals, see and bewail their folly!—may those who have not yet been converted, now be converted, hundreds of them!" And after the earnest prayer he arose and read to them of the dire and terrible passion of the Lord, and, enlarging upon the sacred text, he bade them reflect "how acute must have been that agony when it caused every pore of that pure and blessed body to weep large drops of blood; and wherefore? because a fallen race were about to commit the damning sin that crowns their guilty history, to put to a cruel death the only perfect being that ever was born into the world, to do the greatest wrong ever committed, crucifying in His precious person the embodiment of God's divine love on this

earth." Never had preacher audience more earnest and attentive; for in that supreme moment all earthly thoughts had given place to the solemn considerations proper to those who stood on the verge of the unseen world; and when the holy man proposed to break bread and divide the sacred cup in memory of the great consummation of our redemption, few indeed refused to join in the mystic rite. Muriel, kneeling on her knees, her eyes streaming in grateful tears, felt, in that supreme moment, for the first time a peace, calm and holy, steal on her soul, which had already robbed death of half its terrors.

While these solemn scenes were passing in the cabin, the water had gained on the ship, which was slowly and gradually filling. It was now eleven o'clock a.m., and the wind had slightly moderated. Captain Palmer had given directions that the boats should be got in readiness for lowering, though in such a sea there was but little probability of their living. The Captain also kept as many men as he could spare from the pumps to look out, and he himself swept the horizon with his glass more than once in the faint hope of spying a sail amid the waste of waters. The agony of suspense among the passengers meanwhile—perhaps partly owing to the gentle

teachings of the minister of God—had somewhat abated, and many of the gentlemen were cheerfully aiding the ship's company at the pumps, while amongst the ladies a surprising degree of resignation was manifested; but the water now had begun to enter the saloon, consequently the passengers made a move towards the upper deck; yet a few minutes longer and the joyful cry—a sail! a sail! was heard. Alas! as yet far distant, but still hope revived, and the officers, lively throughout, cheered and encouraged many to toil at the pumps—a work rendered by the wind highly difficult and dangerous. Several revolvers, however, were seen in the hands of the male passengers, who did not conceal their intentions of avoiding in this manner a watery grave; and friends were overheard, in case the ship went down, offering reciprocally to put an end to each other's sufferings. But now commenced a fearful struggle between hope and despair, for the sea is moderating visibly, the strange sail approaching swiftly, having already replied to their signals of distress, at the same time the doomed ship is settling down rapidly stern foremost.

The launching of the boats can now no longer be delayed—it is their only hope; but one lifeboat has

been already smashed by the force of the waves, the other is somehow so entangled in the chain-work, that though cut, it cannot for a moment be lowered; two other boats also have been washed away, so that there now remain scarcely enough to carry the half of the passengers. The pinnace is the first manned and lowered, and those of the ladies who would trust to it rather than to the ship, are told to get in with their children. Muriel was one who had decided on leaving, if her husband would accompany her; but nothing would induce him to move—there he sat huddled up in the very agony of selfish terror; in vain she clutched his arm, and pulled him by the sleeve; stupid with fright, his jaws spasmodically closed, as in a fit—he could not, or would not understand; but time was precious, so two others took their place, and the boat pushed off.

Happy for our heroine she did not put foot in that ill-fated boat, for she foundered within ten yards of the steamer, and every soul perished. The remaining lifeboat was at length disentangled, and lowered; but the crowd on board seemed afraid to leave the ship, having naturally been frightened by the sinking of the iron boat, and seeing the rapid approach of the friendly merchantman.

Muriel was making a second attempt to persuade her husband to move, when she was caught up by a jolly tar, who, at a sign from the Captain, bore the fragile burden in his muscular arms, nor let her go till he had safely deposited her in the boat. Then the remaining boats being lowered, were pushing off, when all were startled by a fearful scream as of a hyæna, or some beast of prey, and all eyes were turned to where over the gunwale appeared the apparition of the bloodless face of a man livid with horror, whence proceeded a voice almost spectral in its hollowness, shrieking out—"Save me! Oh, save me—a thousand guineas if you will only take me in;" but in that solemn hour millions would have been accounted valueless, for the swell round the steamer was so great, that to put back would have been madness, and as it was, the boats had narrowly escaped being sucked into the whirling vortex, so the poor wretch was left to his fate, and Muriel covered her eyes in speechless horror, for it was her husband. Another passenger had some time previous come on deck with his carpet-bag, which, the Captain seeing, had uttered a low, short laugh at the preposterous idea, in such a scene, of thinking of property; but he made no comment.

During all this terrible morning, Captain Palmer, with his chief officer, was seen walking to and fro on the poop, having stated their intention not to leave their devoted vessel till the last. And now the stern of the foundering ship sunk lower and lower, while her stem rose so high that the keel was at times entirely out of water; but by this time the lifeboat had reached the approaching vessel, which, favoured by the wind, was sailing rapidly towards them. A few moments more, and all may yet be saved, for see she lowers her boats, and strains every nerve to reach the ill-fated steamer; but she—oh! horror—sinks down, down, till in a moment she slides beneath the waves, and is lost to sight, leaving an awful gulf, within whose dark walls of whirling water many went down and were swallowed up. As the ship sunk, there was a tremendous and overpowering rush of air from below through deck and hatches, and then all was still. But the boats were close at hand, and their crews were indefatigable in their efforts to rescue all they could, and the sea and wind having happily moderated, their endeavours were crowned with unhoped-for success.

The gallant Captain and his first officer, being strong swimmers, had struck out manfully, and

were picked up immediately. Others—among whom was Costesca, blown by the rush of air clear of the wreck as she sunk—were caught and saved almost by miracle; the Italian, wet, cold, and rigid, gave no sign of life but by a violent trembling of the body and limbs; saved from a much-dreaded watery grave, it is true, but lost for ever from that day to all sympathy with his young wife, who, whatever might once have been her feelings towards him whose name she bore, now regarded him with a contempt and aversion she vainly attempted to control or disguise.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JOY-BELLS.

It is a trite saying that life is like a chess-board, so chequered is it with joys and sorrows, with lights and shadows; if this then be true of life, should not the work of fiction, which is the photograph of the scenes of daily existence, partake likewise of such alternations of bright and dark, even though it carefully exclude—as does our tale—the dagger, the poisoned cup, and all the monstrosities of the sensation novel, leaning rather to the æsthetic side in our desire to make fiction more beautiful than reality? Yet, as, to use the words of Longfellow—

> "The world is full of peril,
> The path that runs through fairest meads,
> On the sunniest side of the valley, leads
> Into a region bleak and sterile."

Therefore, he who would be true to nature, must

lead his readers alike through sunshine, and through devious wandering paths of gloom.

Great had been the rejoicings at Lisle Court when its adored young heir, Sir Bouverie de Lisle, at the age of twenty-three, attained his majority, and entered into the inheritance of the smaller paternal estates. Great had been the acclamations of the tenantry when the proud and dignified mother, widow and daughter of that noble house, had signified her fixed intention of renouncing, in favour of her son, Lisle Court and its broad acres, all of which were entailed on the heirs to the title of Baron, descending, as we know, in the female line in default of male issue, and which otherwise would not have been his of right till the death of the Baroness.

Sir Bouverie, as we may readily imagine, had manfully striven against what he called this spoliation of his mother; but the Baroness, firm as a rock, declared that she had ever from choice resided in the west wing of the mansion, which was ample for her, and that Gerald would, she hoped, soon marry, and then he would find how much of the house would be required for wife and little ones; so there was nothing left for him in this matter but a duteous submission.

The next event, welcomed by the public with equal joy, was the triumphant and unanimous election—almost without opposition, of the conservative candidate, Sir Bouverie de Lisle, to represent his county in Parliament. A model election this, in these venal times, when bribery and corruption reign paramount —no necessity for intrigues, worryings, carousals at taverns, no drinking and speechifying at public houses—everything well conducted; we never could learn, indeed, nor was it even suspected, that the young Sir Bouverie had ever been known to eat cold shoulder of mutton and blackberry pudding with the curate's family, nor had he been induced to kiss the black and sticky mouths of the bairns by way of interesting the mother in his cause, neither did he, we are more than certain, ever give an interested embrace to a farmer's daughter, whether pretty or plain; and yet, when the nomination day came, it was pretty well known by the rival candidate that all chance for him was at an end, and so he very wisely withdrew from the contest ere the polling commenced, which in this case was a mere matter of form, Sir Bouverie, in racing parlance, having walked over the course. A time of still greater festivity, however, was in store for the happy tenantry of a mas-

ter so beloved, a mistress so revered, when Sir Bouverie de Lisle, M.P., brought home to the halls of his fathers his young and beauteous bride, the Lady Mildred, second daughter of the Duke of Glengarrow. Oh! then there was such a strewing of flowers by children all in white, and triumphal arches, and a ball for the tenantry, in which the bride and bridegroom themselves took part, and a supper and games for the labourers, and fireworks for the children, and what-not; for the Baroness's proudest hopes had been crowned with success at last, her Gerald had wedded the high-born maiden so long designed for him, and the gratified lady was determined on fêting the young couple in almost regal style.

Now this much-desired marriage had been brought about on this wise. Sir Bouverie de Lisle having taken his seat in the House, and declared his political principles in a neat, concise, and promising maiden speech, found himself soon closely connected with the party which owned for its leader the Duke of Glengarrow—which party expected, sooner or later, to see the Duke at the head of the administration. Now we all know that political ties are certainly stronger than those of blood, and that they unite men often more closely than even those of friend-

ship. Sir Bouverie, therefore, in the recess, had run down to Glengarrow, where, he flattered himself, the nation would greatly benefit by his conferences with his chief, and where the deer and grouse certainly did *not* benefit, by the presence of so active and keen a sportsman as our hero. But the charms of politics or deer-stalking, or the still more interesting occupation of watching the roundest and whitest arm in the world, while fairy fingers awoke the silvery echoes of the harp in those princely halls, could not last for ever; and the youthful embryo cabinet minister talked of returning south, having engaged himself, he said, for an autumnal tour of visits. The usual pressing to stay longer was gone through, but without avail; however, on the morning vowed to departure—post horses having been ordered, Sir Bouverie was startled by the intelligence that his mother had arrived, and was closetted with the Duchess in her boudoir, where they both begged him to pass for a few minutes. Gerald lost no time in obeying the summons, and after embracing affectionately the Baroness, he said—

"Dearest mother, how unfortunate—for me, at least—you should have arrived the very morning of m[illegible]ture!"

"But why, my dear Bouverie," said the Duchess, "may we not prevail on you to remain with us a little longer?"

"Impossible, my dear Duchess," replied Sir Bouverie; "the attractions here have made me shamefully remiss as regards my other friends. Lord Mervyn has expected me since the 1st of October; and as for Lady Henry Preston, I feel sure I have affronted her for life, besides——"

"And your mother," expostulated her Grace; "will you leave us just as she has joined our circle?"

"My dear mother will excuse me, I know," pleaded Gerald; "besides, Duchess, do you remember how long I have trespassed on your hospitality?—positively ever since the 11th of August, and it is now the 7th of October. I think (with a smile) I had better pitch my tent here!"

"I wish to Heavens you would, dear Bouverie," rejoined the Duchess.

Here the Baroness put a spoke in the wheel.

"My son is well aware what are *my* wishes, my dear friend; he knows (let us understand each other for once) he knows the hope of an alliance betwee our families to be the dearest wish of my heart."

"Ah," sighed the Duchess, putting her handker-

chief to her eyes; "and my darling girl—so sweet, so affectionate, is drooping, both in health and spirits—the delicacy of chest, which appeared to be cured while she breathed the soft Tuscan air, again causes the Duke and myself intense anxiety. Her cough——"

"Say no more, dear friend!" exclaimed Lady de Lisle; "I myself will inform my son of the confidential communication I received from yourself, and which is the occasion of my hurried journey, and my presence here this day. Gerald, my own darling, our sweet Mildred—she who has refused to mate with the best and noblest of the land—she whose perfect beauty of form and feature has been the theme of the poet, the hopeless dream of the painter—this peerless and high-born maiden has fixed her pure, young affections on one, (smiling and tapping his cheek,) quite unworthy of so great an honour; and, let me add (and this she said in a whisper) that had my son intended nothing, he has not acted quite like himself in remaining so long under this roof, and near that innocent child, to whose artless feelings he could not have been entirely a stranger."

Gerald, we must confess, knew not how to parry so sudden and unexpected an attack. He therefore

merely muttered something unintelligible, in which the words "regret" and "flattered" were audible.

"My boy," pursued Lady de Lisle, still in a low voice, "you have more than realised my fondest hopes; let the Duchess and myself ensure to you a happiness such as falls to the lot of few. Down on your knees," she added gaily, and in a louder tone; "my gallant knight, and swear eternal fealty and gratitude to the noble *chatelaine* of this castle!"

What could our unfortunate, or, rather, fortunate, hero (as the case may be,) do, in such a strait, pressed so closely by two ladies, one the mother he so loved, and given to understand that the belle of belles—the beauty for whom half London and all Florence had sighed in vain—was dying for him; how could he do other than succumb? Love, as a passion, he believed to be for ever stifled in his soul, and now that the fever of ambition had invaded and possessed his heart, could he choose a more suitable wife than the high-born daughter of the leader of his party—beautiful as a houri, gentle and tender as a young dove, with blood pure as that which flowed in his own veins, the favourite of his mother, whose every whim it had ever been her son's highest happiness to gratify? All these thoughts flashed like lightning

through the mind of the young man, and long ere we could have time to write it, he was at the feet of the Duchess, her fingers raised to his lips—the accepted suitor for the hand of her daughter. But his mother's rapture knew no bounds.

"God bless you, my own Gerald—my beloved boy!" was all she could utter through her tears; "God for ever bless you, and her!"

The Lady Mildred was of course fetched by her mother, but we don't quite think she would have died for Sir Bouverie, or indeed for anyone, though we doubt not she liked and admired her handsome young lover as much as her quiet and rather cold nature would permit, and likewise she felt proud and pleased to be his chosen bride; but we do not think she will ever worship him as much as her sister, sweet Lady Guinever worships Charles Beltravers, and we know that Sir Bouverie's sentiments in the matter are not one whit warmer, if so warm, as those of the young lady. Nevertheless, the post horses were countermanded, and the happy lover gave up his projected tour of visits.

In the following spring they were wed; or, to use the words of the *Morning Post*: Sir Gerald Bouverie de Lisle, Bart., M.P., of Lisle Court, Warwickshire,

led to the hymeneal altar the Lady Mildred St. Aubyn, the beautiful and accomplished daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Glengarrow. Then followed a long list of distinguished names present at the ceremony, and amongst the eight lovely and noble bridesmaids the two younger daughters of the Duchess, the Ladies Violet and Edith St. Aubyn, were remarked as being only second in beauty and attraction to the peerless bride.

The *Post* devoted a couple of columns to this "marriage in high life," and seemed actually redolent with orange-blossoms and myrtle; sparkling with diamonds, enveloped in a haze of Brussels lace, smothered in wedding favours; it surpassed itself—indeed, nothing short of the marriage of the Princess Royal with the Crown Prince of Prussia had ever attained in its eyes to such a pitch of grandeur. St. George's, Hanover Square, seemed to totter with the weight of its responsibility, and it took an archbishop and a couple of bishops to tie the aristocratic knot with sufficient security. Then the breakfast was given in a style of the most princely magnificence by the Duke and Duchess of Glengarrow, in the family mansion in Grosvenor Square; indeed, in the wedding-cake Gunter surpassed him-

self—it being of exquisite design, a very miracle of artistic taste.

"Immediately after the breakfast," pursued the *Post*, "the happy bridegroom and his young and lovely bride left in a chariot and four, to pass the honeymoon at the marine villa of the noble father of the bride, situate on the picturesque coast of Devon, after which Sir Bouverie and Lady Mildred de Lisle will proceed to Lisle Court, the family seat of the Baronet."

Such is the account of this aristocratic gathering, abridged from the columns of the *Morning Post*, but, strange to say, the name and presence of one guest was omitted, who had not on a wedding garment. A slight, girlish figure, in a dark dress, and closely veiled cottage bonnet, sat, or rather leaned against a column in a secluded pew in the gallery, which yet commanded a view of the whole church. Here, unseen and unmarked, the girl, kneeling on her knees, seemed to join with heartfelt fervour in the prayers, though ever and anon a stifled sob burst from her overcharged bosom, and her handkerchief, frequently applied to her eyes, seemed saturated with moisture. None of that gay company noted the sad and solitary mourner, in that festive scene, but

the bridegroom turned his face more than once in the direction of that secluded nook, as if magnetically attracted by some unseen, but irresistible influence which took there its source.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MAN OF GOD.

The ship which had thus been the means, under Providence, of rescuing so many of the passengers and crew of the lost steamer was called the "Queen of the Seas." She was bound from Smyrna to London, with a cargo of oranges, spices, dried fruits, and such like articles of eastern luxury. The captain and sailors received the poor shipwrecked ones with the greatest kindness and hospitality, lending their own clothing to the men, and generously furnishing the ladies with burnouses and other articles of wearing apparel they were bringing to England, either as presents or for sale.

Joyful indeed were the meetings, heartfelt the congratulations of those who had thought never to meet again in this world, though many and bitter were the tears shed by those who had survived hus-

bands, wives, parents, children, all who had perished as it were, before their eyes.

Muriel was welcomed by her fellow passengers with the warmest demonstrations of almost affection. Nor was the devoted clergyman, the Reverend Mr. Harrison, of New York, received by the rescued of his little flock with coldness or ingratitude, and during the voyage, which lasted some days ere the nearest English port could be reached, many appeared to be deeply impressed by his ministrations, and desirous of profiting by a continuance of them.

Of an extremely childlike and guileless nature, this good man seemed to draw inspiration, direct and pure from the very fountain head. The great truths of religion were grasped by his ingenuous mind in all their breadth and grandeur; a bitter foe to that narrow spirit of sectarianism which proudly arrogates to itself the sole right of judgment, condemning all who hold a contrary opinion: the man of God, like his divine Master, placed the essence of christianity in love, love to God, to the neighbour, waging a noble war against creeds and churches as ends or tests of godliness. "Come, all," he would say, when inviting to the blessed supper of the Lord, "Come all, whether Romanists, Wesleyans, Church

of England, Unitarians, come all ye who in truth love the Lord Jesus, and join with the Church universal, here below and the saints in glory, in celebrating this sacred rite instituted by our common Lord."

Muriel hung upon the good man's words an entranced listener, an apt and ready pupil. Never had she seen before the perfect beauty of the teachings of Jesus; never had the voice of God before made itself heard in her soul. Now she paced the deck night after night by the preacher's side, beneath the placid stars, feeling that she had found a kindred nature at last, beginning to understand, how, that in Gilead there is a balm for all woes, beginning to feel the refreshing and life-giving breezes from the once far off, now more plainly discerned morning land. Never did this holy man repress with bigot's gloomy frown the mind sincere in its search for light, even though he perceived it, as it were, "rushing in where angels fear to tread." It was his beautiful belief that a new era is about to dawn on a benighted world, in which it will not be forbidden to the most religious to be likewise the most intellectual; for the christian, he said, ought to be in the widest sense of the word, the highest style of man. Christ had not

only taught us to love God with "all our hearts" but with "all our *minds* and *souls*, and with all our *strength*," intellectually and morally; from this he deduced that it is the Christian's duty to cultivate to the utmost each capacity and every talent, feeling sure, that in the great gospel teachings, *rightly understood*, there can be no incongruities, and that nothing *can* be *theologically correct* which is not likewise *philosophically true*.

One more illustration of this good man's mode of reasoning, confident of the indulgence of the thoughtful of our readers, we will quote.

Being asked to give his theory on the origin of evil—that great problem, the stumbling-block alike of the sage and the infidel, throughout all ages—Mr. Harrison replied with gentleness, that he doubted not it would be conceded by all, that in the Deity alone dwells infinite perfection, and therefore, unless God should create beings *as perfect as* Himself (a supposition which could not be entertained by any reasonable man) He must, in enduing his creatures with free will, have foreseen the *possibility* of their choosing evil, because with INFINITE PERFECTION alone rests the *impossibility* of such choice, for indeed he quoted happily—

"Worlds of angels blest,
Compared to God, are but as painted forms
Mirrored within a burning concave lens,
Daguerotypes of Deity; that shine
As pictures in the palace hall sublime
OF HIM WHO IS. And space is but a mirror,
And all its glories that endure for ever
The waking visions of the Infinite."

"No, my friends, believe me, God cannot require us to believe what is *contrary* to his noblest gift, our *reason*, He being its greatest Source and Inspiration; but He can and does require we should believe those mysteries which our reason cannot fathom, because they lie beyond its scope—for how can the finite compass the Infinite? the creature comprehend the Creator?"

Thus in converse, pleasant and profitable, was the tedium and monotony of the voyage beguiled, till the ship sighted the port of Plymouth. Sad was the prospect of parting to Muriel, from her beloved pastor, who could not even tell her whither he was bound, for, like Paul the Apostle, he went "whithersoever he was sent," and held himself in readiness to move to whatever part of the world might open to him the widest sphere of usefulness.

One other word on this interesting character, who

is drawn from life, and we have done. The Rev. Mr. Harrison was once the highly respected and also most eloquent minister of one of the largest and most fashionable churches in the city of New York. In that land, where there are no tithes and no church rates, it depends entirely upon the preacher's oratorical endowments, and other qualities, whether he draws, or not, and consequently whether his pew rents produce a large or small return. Now it so happened, that Mr. Harrison's high gifts and brilliant talents were most fully appreciated by the intellectual congregation who had elected him to fill their pulpit. For weeks, months, indeed we believe years, he was followed, idolized, worshipped, till one Sunday he preached doctrines too spiritual, too closely searching, to please the fastidious taste of his flock. A deputation of the elders of the church waited on him, and gently remonstrated. The reply of this true servant of God was: "My friends, I cannot preach other doctrine than that shown me by my Lord and Master." Three successive Sundays was the offence repeated, together with a sharper remonstrance from the congregation, and a still more decisive reply on the part of the pastor. On the fourth, the good and faithful servant was

turned out of the church *penniless,* for his bread depended on his profession. Yet has he since been frequently heard to say, his Father had never forsaken, nor forgotten to give him his daily bread.

But to return. In due time then the passengers were landed on the shores of England. With many expressions of gratitude, not unmingled with tears, did Muriel bid farewell to him who had opened to her the glories of the unseen world. Kindly the good man laid his hand on the young head, and blessed her, bidding her be strong, and "fight the good fight of faith, till the end. It is but for a short time, dear child," he said; "and then blessed is he that overcometh." Do not forget the Christian life is a battle, not a time of rest. Let us, then, use diligence, and not sleep at our post. And now, God bless and keep you—we shall meet again."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MYSTERY.

So Muriel, at the same time sad, yet rejoicing in spirit, left for London with her husband. There arrived, they put up at a quiet hotel, till Costesca should find apartments, or a suitable house, in which to pursue his professional avocations.

A few mornings after their arrival, when seated at breakfast, Costesca broached to his wife the subject which for some time had been uppermost in his mind. His was one of those natures so habituated to intrigue and mystery in his own person, and so prone to suspect it in others, that it seemed as if he never could give or accept of a plain reason for a plain fact, if it were possible to divine causes for it, obscure, far-fetched, and (we may add) not usually worth the carriage. It was therefore with a smile, false as his uncandid heart, that he thus addressed his wife, speaking in French, the language they

mostly used when together, because, being a Neapolitan, Costesca pronounced Italian badly, and he likewise spoke English with an accent by no means pleasing to the ear: thus it happened they had usually kept to the French tongue, where they met on neutral ground:—

"*Ma chère amie,*" he commenced, swallowing his coffee in large gulps at intervals, "you cannot conceive the difficulty I find in getting a small house to suit us. Just at this season everything, as you are aware, is so enormously dear."

"Then let us take apartments, Waldemar. I should be equally contented."

"That would scarcely do, my dear; what with my lessons—for of course some pupils will come to my house—and rehearsals, and one thing or another, it would drive you distracted."

"I am aware my nerves have been greatly shaken by my illness, and our other misfortunes," she said, looking down, not to see, as she fancied, his confusion.

But he replied at once, not observing, or not willing to observe:—

"Gisella, apropos to your health, I have been reflecting it would be perhaps best you should live

somewhere in the suburbs of town. Brompton, perhaps, or Kensington."

"Nothing on earth I should like better, Waldemar, if I can have a small garden and a few flowers. I shall be as happy as the day's long," she replied cheerfully.

"*Fichtre!* she's extravagant, the little lady! a bedroom and a sitting-room must content her, however, as her husband will have to be much in town."

"You will be much away, and why so?"

"Has my little Gisella forgotten my engagements, lessons, concerts, &c.? where is the money to come from if Costesca does not work?"

"True, I had forgotten; then we must dine at six, and you can dress and go to your evening engagements afterwards, as London hours are so very late now——."

"*Chère amie*, you don't reason—women never do. How can I sing after a late dinner? and how, if I am engaged—as I mostly shall be—morning and evening during the season, can I be running up and down to dine with you?"

Muriel looked at him, as if she did not exactly see the drift of the conversation. After finishing an egg, and a slice of toast he had been holding

between thumb and finger, he possibly felt more strengthened to continue.

"My idea, then, is that you should reside a little out of town, and I will return to my old bachelor lodgings for a time, because—because, *chère amie*" —and he laughed his evil laugh—"it is quite unnecessary to let the world know I have taken a wife."

"And why so, pray?" said Muriel, astonished, and somewhat wounded in her woman's dignity at the same time; "are you then ashamed of having married me?"

"Now again, you do not reason, Gisella; because I show an intense interest, an immense regard for your health, you say I am ashamed of you. Of course I shall come down to you as often as possible—every week, certainly—from Saturday till Monday, that you may count upon, my dear. You must be aware that an *artiste* invited into society for his talents is unable to present his wife—you see that?" But Muriel merely signed her acquiescence, and Costesca proceeded—"Had my Gisella again found her sweet voice and continued her theatrical career, things would have been different; the Signorina Albrandoni, the successful prima donna, would of course have been courted and *fêted* wherever she

went; but the wife, unknown to fame, of the singer Costesca, is a very different person; in such a case a wife is an encumbrance (a very charming one, certainly in private life), but not the less, artistically speaking, you see, a clog to her husband, a drawback to his success in the salons of the great world — and in the boudoirs where he has the honour to give his lessons."

"Since such are your ideas, Waldemar, I really am astonished you ever married; it is, indeed, quite a pity you should have thrown yourself away."

"Upon one who so little values the compliment— eh, *chère amie*—is it not that you would say? But you must please to remember that when this foolish idea entered my head you had (as some tenor unknown to fame was once heard to declare) '*Cent milles francs dans le gorge;*' is it, then, my fault that your voice has departed?"

"No, Waldemar; but had I to-morrow a voice superior to Cruvelli and the genius of a Pasta and a Malibran united, nothing on earth would now induce me ever to tread those hated boards again."

"As you please, my dear," replied her husband, with a sneer, "only do not then blame me for my complete devotion to a profession which was my

father's before me, and which my brothers are now practising successfully."

"*I* blame you! far from it; I am quite ready to do as you wish."

"That is well, *chère amie*. As there are people here who know all about my early life, it is as well they should not see you, or even know I am married. You understand me, Gisella mia?"

And she did at last *begin* to comprehend the craft and worldliness of that shallow, selfish nature, though she could not even then decipher altogether the befouled and blotted page of the man's unclean soul; nor could poor Muriel, on reflection, regret that a residence too distant from London for daily intercourse would make her mistress of her own time almost entirely, and greatly emancipate her from the society of a husband from whom now, alas! she struggled hard to repress the feelings of positive aversion which had, since the fatal shipwreck, taken violent possession of her bosom. Joyfully, then, did she consent to this temporary separation, proposing in the solitude of her suburban villa to enjoy, at least, tranquillity and repose.

CHAPTER XL.

MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE.

Sir Bouverie de Lisle, then, had given himself up, heart and soul, to the charms and excitement of public life. Yet young enough in years, and in parliament, not to have ceased to trust in the purity of human motives, in the unselfishness of self-styled patriots, he surrendered himself a willing slave to the party he had joined, and in whose integrity of purpose he religiously believed. Early and late he worked—when not in the House in the privacy of his own study, in order to master the great popular questions of the day. He pored over the lives of Pitt, Fox, Sheridan, and worked himself into enthusiasm over the fiery eloquence of Burke; so that, ere long, the young member for Warwickshire was not only considered a graceful orator, and a successful speaker, but even his opinion came to have weight in the House, till ere long, people began to name Sir Bou-

verie de Lisle (should his party come in) as sure of being offered a seat in the cabinet. Later, indeed, when experience had opened his eyes to much of the hollowness and insincerity of party men—the first blush of success over, our hero became a little—a very little—disenchanted; but even this disappointment but sobered him down, and paved the way to his becoming the useful and practical statesman, rather than the mere theoretical utopian. And thus did Gerald each day seem to be advancing in the upward path the maternal pride of the Baroness had long since marked out for his feet; while she watched from her retirement at Lisle Court her son's political career with the deepest interest, sympathising with what she termed his noble ambition, intoxicated with a success so rapid and so complete as to surpass even her fondest and wildest hopes. But if the mother watched with the most intense anxiety and pride each step in the ladder of fame taken by the youthful aspirant, it must be confessed, on the other hand, that of private comfort and inspiration at home, the lately-wedded husband knew little. The late hours at the House frequently kept him away from Park Lane until three or four o'clock in the morning, and not unfrequently public business obliged

him—or, at least, he fancied it obliged him—hastily to devour a cutlet in the coffee-room of the House of Commons, instead of returning to his sumptuous dinner of half-a-dozen courses at home. Lady Mildred, too, immersed in the vortex of London dissipation, had neither time nor inclination to mark the domestic delinquencies of her lord. Operas, balls, fêtes, concerts, the park, and shopping, occupied her time so completely, as to leave little time for necessary repose, much less for thought or feeling; and beyond the trifling annoyance of being deprived of her husband's escort to some public or private place of fashionable amusement, the absence of the young master of the house was but little noted, while he, on his part, satisfied that his beautiful wife went into society under the wing of her mother, the Duchess of Glengarrow, and in company with her two young sisters, the Ladies Violet and Edith St. Aubyn, left her entirely mistress of her actions, by day and by night.

Can it be wondered at, that pursuits so diverse, and a life so unnatural, left the young couple no time for the innocent and graceful nothings of hourly life, which contribute more than anything to form in a married couple—not altogether unsuited previously

—the basis of a lasting attachment? Need it create surprise that estrangement built up its icy barrier gradually between them, and that continued estrangement grew at last into almost indifference? But here there was a pause; indifference never, in them, became dislike—both were too handsome, too refined, too good-tempered, too well bred; they respected and liked each other still—they were friends—nothing more. As time passed onward, the young couple were more and more rarely together, till at last, for weeks and months they never met but on a Sunday—a day that Sir Bouverie considered it to be his duty to devote to domestic life—if domestic life it could be called, when a succession of gentlemen visitors filled the reception rooms of Lady Mildred from two o'clock till time to dress for dinner, under the plea that they came to find Sir Bouverie, it being his off day: and a grand dinner wound up the proceedings, either in Park Lane, or at the Duchess of Glengarrow's, in Grosvenor Square, a gathering of the family and intimates, in number from twenty to thirty at the least. It was therefore a most unusual occurrence when, one morning, Sir Bouverie entered his wife's dressing-room, as she sat dawdling over a breakfast even later than usual, while her maid, by

her ladyship's desire, was displaying her jewels on a table near, with a view to her mistress making choice of a *parure* for the opera, and two or three parties, to which she was going that evening.

"My dear Mildred," said Sir Bouverie, seating himself, after the abigail had retired; "I have brought you the *Times*. I find they have reported my speech of last night in full. I thought it might interest you to look it over."

"Oh! thanks, Bouverie," lisped her ladyship, still attentively examining the respective merits of a pearl aigrette and a diamond tiara; "but you know I detest politics, and never understand speeches."

He looked annoyed.

"But your husband's, Mildred?"

"I assure you, Bouverie, I am quite proud, and all that, but you really must excuse me this morning, for I danced all last night, and feel almost dead with fatigue; and my head is aching fearfully."

"And yet, you propose going out to-night! Oh, Mildred, why not stay at home occasionally? You are killing yourself."

"I am absolutely forced to go to-night, because, you know, mamma wants to see the new opera so much."

"Let the Duchess go with your sisters, dear Mildred, if you are suffering," he persisted, kindly.

"Oh, you silly Bouverie! how little you know beyond your tiresome speeches. I have three parties on hand after the opera—the Duchess of S.'s concert, then a ball at Lady C.'s, and another at the Hon. Mrs. R.'s, besides being engaged three deep for every dance at each of them."

"Oh, Mildred, do you think it becoming in a married lady to dance so much? I thought, after marriage, it was usual to give up such follies!"

"Oh, nonsense! it would look so stupid to sit all night against the wall, like an old dowager, while Violet and Edy are polking away."

"I wish," said Sir Bouverie, gravely, "I wish, Mildred, you would rather take example by your married sister, Lady Guinever."

"Oh! but Jennie, you know, always stays at Earlesliffe; of course, when in Rome she 'would do as the Romans do.'"

Sir Bouverie turned on his heel to leave the room and the society of his frivolous wife, for the more congenial atmosphere of those who are supposed to

rule the destiny of the nation; when the voice of the lady recalled him.

"Bouverie dear, mamma says we must give a concert, or a ball, or something, this season."

He had his hand on the handle of the door, but he stopped as she spoke.

"Really, Mildred, I don't exactly perceive any such necessity. Why turn the house out of windows, making the servants and every one else uncomfortable?"

"Mamma says we go out so much we must return the civilities we accept."

"Why say *we?* Speak in the singular number, please. *I* never go out; but for Heaven's sake don't let us have any balls here."

"Well, then, it shall be a concert; now don't go, Bouverie, it is so seldom I can catch you. I want you to fix the day."

"It must be on a Wednesday, because on that day the House rises early; let it be Wednesday then."

"What do you say to my birthday, Bouverie, Wednesday the 20th June?"

"So be it, fair queen of the month of roses; now who are your singers, amateurs or artistes?"

"Mamma thinks professionals are more *là môde*. Let me see, who sang last Monday at the court concert. Ah! here is the programme, printed on white satin—Bosio, Didier, Ronconi, Costesca."

"Who did you say?" exclaimed her husband sternly.

"Oh my poor head—the man who made such a *furore* at court—I said Costesca."

"Now mark me, Mildred; never shall that scoundrel darken my doors, *never*. If he is so ill-advised as to enter them, be sure he shall be kicked down stairs by one of your tall lazy footmen there."

"Why how you raise your voice—what have I done, Bouverie?" and the spoiled beauty melted into tears and pouted—here was a husband stern and unreasonable, interfering with what in no wise concerned him. "He has grown quite cross," she thought, "since he went into that stupid House of Commons, and thinks of nothing but talking from morning till night, and from night to morning; the idea of interfering with one's parties, the barbarian!"

The injured wife's reflections were interrupted by a light and gentle touch on her ivory shoulder,—

"You are nervous, dear Mildred; forgive me if I was harsh,"—kissing her brow. "Let us have no concert—a ball if you wish it, by all means. And now adieu, I must go to the House."

CHAPTER XLI.

UNDER AN EVIL PLANET.

Nor was the Baroness de Lisle the only being who watched with deep sympathy and tender solicitude the political career of Sir Bouverie. There was yet another—young, lovely, loving—whose sad life knew no other joy than day by day to read of the success of one whose image now filled her whole existence. Conscious, too, that her deep admiration of the brother of her youth sprung from no unholy, no impure source, Muriel felt in thus indulging it, not one sting of self-reproach. Although her idol was for ever parted from her, by ties strong as death, she still loved him, as she might an angel of God—still longed for, prayed for his happiness as she had done on that eventful morning which gave him for ever to another; for if a few natural tears of regret for what might have been, had fallen from her eyes in this solemn hour, no envious feelings at least

had embittered them; and when Gerald, her early playmate, the friend of her childhood, left the church with one bright and beautiful as a vision—now his own—for whose sweet sake he had even now sworn to "forsake all others," Muriel had found in her heart to bid God bless them both. Perhaps in earlier days it might not have been so, but nothing shews to us more clearly the transitory, the fleeting nature of all that makes life valuable, as does the near prospect of death; and Muriel having stood, as it were, face to face with the king of terrors, the idea was ever present with her, as a consoling reality, that trials, if rightly borne, are but *for a time;* and thus while she rejoiced in the joy of those she loved, she was willing in her own person to accept the fate she had in a measure courted by her own imprudence, believing that to cultivate resignation would in time bring a never failing blessing. Happy for her that the teachings of the good minister had taken root in her soul! for now she was much alone.

Costesca, who at first had come to Brompton at least every week, now only returned at intervals of longer and still longer duration, till at last he absented himself almost entirely from home. Muriel, in sooth, preferred his absence to his presence, for

during the few hours he spent in the company of his wife, he had the bad taste to talk perpetually of his success in society, throwing out innuendos as to the *bonnes fortunes* hourly offered to him, to which, as as he said, nothing but the consideration of his being a married man prevented his responding.

Muriel, though these details inspired her with a disgust she scarcely might conceal, still felt a certain shame when Costesca's visits became so rare as to be almost things of the past. That the woman of the house should observe and perhaps comment upon the neglect of her husband, was to her as wormwood, and her pride suffered sorely when that person came in to ask what the orders were for dinner, and whether she was to prepare for one or for two, to be obliged to invent some new excuse each morning. "The signor," she would say, "has so many lessons, I don't know whether he will be able to come home to-day;" or, "he is I know rehearsing for the new opera, and his time is at present entirely taken up;" or, as a last resource, she would say, "my husband, having gone a professional tour in the provinces, I do not expect he can be back for some weeks." All this was very well, but professional engagements do not last for ever, and these excuses did not im-

pose upon the woman, and Muriel was aware they did not.

However, as the lodger paid her rent every week with the greatest exactitude, having, as we know, her small fortune at her own disposition, the landlady contented herself by merely shaking her head when the neighbours began to gossip about the lovely lady who never had any visits, and whose husband was always away, saying "she must confess she had her own suspicions about the seenior and the lady; she hoped as how she wor his wife, she really did."

What would Muriel have given to call upon her uncle, Dr. Petersham; but she felt that such a step would be worse than useless, knowing as she did her relation's intense selfishness, and what an armour of worldliness encased his heart; knowing, too, how much he despised the class into which she had descended by her marriage. Had good Aunt Griselda been alive, Muriel felt she could have humbled herself to her, felt she would have dared to implore her to pay her one visit, just to shew the coarse vulgar lodging house woman that she was a lady, and respectable. But mild Mrs. Petersham had passed into a another and a better world, leaving Misses Emma and Lucy, her maiden sisters, the happy *pro tempore*

housekeepers of their widowed brother-in-law, the Doctor; and Muriel felt that she could bear any obloquy from Mrs. Shoeblack, rather than be beholden to these precise and prudish old maids, who would only have confirmed her uncle in his selfish resolution to ignore any relationship with the *ci devant* actress, now wife of the music master Costesca.

Muriel thought of Lady Hazlitt, "she used to be good natured enough. I do not wish to visit her, but I will ask her just to call upon me, once only, she cannot refuse surely." Thus thinking, Muriel, who was one of those ladies who never let "I dare not wait upon I would" for more than a few moments, at once made her neat and simple toilet, in which she thought she might venture to invade the precincts of the dull and dingy, though imposing mansion in Portman Square, inhabited by the alderman's widow. She then called a cab, telling the driver where to go; but when she had got half way she perceived she had no card—she, so little used to paying visits, had not even had any printed. "Never mind, Lady Hazlitt would not remember me by my married name. I will send up the name of Miss Brandon, and explain to her afterwards that I have changed it." Thus thinking, the cab drove

up to the door of the house indicated, and the coachman gave a loud rat-tat-tat, which made poor Muriel's heart sink within her, and already almost wish she had not been so bold as to come out on such an errand.

"Is Lady Hazlitt at home?"

"Don't know, Miss," said the tall man in plush, eyeing the strange visitor with an air of impertinent *nonchalance*. "Please send up a card, Miss. My lady don't see no one she don't know."

"Oh, but I know Lady Hazlitt very well, that is, I *did*, a few years ago. I have forgotten my card, would you please go in and say, Miss Brandon, Miss Muriel Brandon."

The footman left on his errand, and entered the dining-room, where there seemed to be a very merry party, at lunch, judging from the sound of loud laughter, and the very savory odours which greeted the olfactory nerves of the young lady, and the various dishes which continually passed in and out during the time Muriel stood in the entrance hall waiting a reply.

"She will, probably, ask me in to lunch," thought our innocent heroine; and she looked at her dark silk dress—so plainly made—and her cloth *pardessus*,

wondering whether she could accept such invite, in so simple a toilet, and feeling—(however unromantic it may sound)—a very fair quantum of appetite; which made the idea of such a lunch rather pleasant than otherwise. She was, therefore, thunderstruck to hear the loud, vulgar voice of Lady Hazlitt say, in tones of unmistakeable annoyance—

"What name did you say, John? Mrs. What?"

John, who had spoken in a low tone the first time, now raised his voice a little—

"Miss Brandon, my lady, I think the young person said, Miss Mary Brandon."

"Don't know such a person. Pray, John, remember, I am *never at home* when that person calls. D'ye hear, John?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Some one, I fancy," said her ladyship, turning to her guests, "after the governess's place. I have had such a string of 'em—one would think all the single women in town wanted to be governesses—ha! ha! ha!" helping herself to a large portion of lemon cream, and two or three cheese-cakes. "I only see French ones, however, now."

But Muriel did not wait to be turned out by the well fed obsequious John, in obedience to the

alderman's widow's mandate; lightly she sprang at once into the cab—tears of angry pride starting to her eyes—vowing that should be the last time she ever would so humble herself again. Thankful, at least, she had not so acted towards her uncle, and the feminines who kept his house. Neither to her Aunt Alston would she write, though that lady would, perhaps, have replied, for Muriel's six hundred a-year, which kept her isolated from those who can feel for pecuniary distress alone, would have proved too strong a bait to the poor curate and his family.

"Why then," reflected the lonely girl, "should I allow myself to be robbed? if my relations have never done their duty by me, if they have, by neglect, and by withholding from me their sympathy, occasioned my misfortune; wherefore should I spend on any of them the small fortune, which at least keeps me above want?"

"No, I will not write to the Alstons; and henceforth I will consider all ties of kindred as if they had never existed. I will fight my own way in this cruel world as long as I am condemned to grope in its darkness—and none shall know of my sufferings—my burden I will bear alone."

But Muriel did not even then know what a weight of burden would be laid on those frail shoulders. There are some people in this world, like the hunted hart, which the darts of misfortune seem never to tire in piercing; others, on the contrary, do what they will, all goes well, all prospers with them—they seem born under favourable influences—some mild and benignant planet rules their destinies.

Astrologers will tell you that the stars really do affect our earth, her kingdoms, and the individuals which form their peoples, with their occult influences, and who shall deny altogether the truth of this? Has not all science and all law some foundation of truth? Did not the Magi of the East predict—*by the stars*—the birth of Messiah, the Prince? Did they not say, "we have seen *His star* in the East and are come to worship him!"

"Each world created by Almighty power,
Is symbolized by some terrestrial flower,
And every flower is—in its destinies,
Governed by some pure sun sphere in the skies.
Metals and minerals are not less than these
Subject to Heaven's vast orb-like harmonies;
And stars there are to correspond to all
The precious crystals of our earthly ball."

True or false, this idea of the poet is beautiful. But we incline to the opinion that beauty is the test of truth, and reciprocally truth of beauty. The laws of right, or truth, are harmonious as those of beauty, and both are immutable as God, whose attributes they are; and though we may not see that these laws are unchangeable, they are not the less so. When Christ, the perfect one, was crucified, all the world thought him wrong, yet HE WAS RIGHT; and the world only begins now, in the light of ages, to perceive the Divine beauty of his character. And are not the true and the beautiful to be found united in all Nature's laws, in poetry, philosophy, art, in the doctrines of the Bible, in the teachings of the church universal, above all in the silent inspirations of our higher and inner being; so that to those not wilfully blind, despite of the myriads of fables veiling her face, truth clothed in eternal beauty may manifest herself to him who seeks her earnestly, even here below, so that he who runs may read if he will.

CHAPTER XLII.

SOUL PICTURES.

Most of us have heard or read of the lightning pictures often indelibly stamped on the bodies of those who have been struck by the electric fluid, such, for instance, as the mark on the arm of the sufferer of the stem or branches of the sheltering tree; and all, too, are aware of the fact, that the undulations of the medium we call light form images on the retina of the eye, of all that passes within our sphere of vision; wherefore, then, should we refuse to credit what some have stated to be the case, that all material nature forms one grand panorama, on which is photographed each word we have spoken, each movement we have made, whether the billows of sound have borne on their crest curses or blessings; whether the air has vibrated to the tread of the footstep, swift to do good, or been flung aside by the vengeful arm of the murderer in his wrath? Rocks,

mountains, trees, aye, the very walls of our dwelling, all—all are stamped alike for evil or for good, all displayed alike to the gaze of the recording angel! We have read of seers whose gift it was to view in the surface of a stone, in the sections of a crystal, or the bark of a tree, these soul pictures, reading, as in a book, of the scenes to which they had been silent witnesses in times far off, hidden in the bosom of the ages.

Aware, as we are, that such things are held by the unreflecting to be mere follies, nursery tales for the amusement of full-grown babies, we will at least suggest to these sapient objectors that we have proofs that the *mightiest forces originate in the realm of the unseen.* The viewless wind, electricity, the magnet, the great forces of attraction and repulsion, that chemical action which is ever changing the face of our globe; indeed, all the great occult forces of creation are of the super-sensuous world. That philosophy, therefore (if worthy of such holy name), which doubts whatever is not cognizant to the senses, is, to say the least, of the very shallowest water. But should perchance this idea be a fact, then what a sad and fearful record of our lives may be stereotyped around us! what painful dis-

closures of our most secret thoughts and actions may be made to the "cloud of witnesses," to use the words of the apostle, which surround us on every side.

Our poor heroine's dark chamber was doubtless draped in sadness. Her rich, sympathetic nature, which would have budded and bloomed in the kindly atmosphere of affection, withered in the poor barren soil of an uncongenial marriage. Even had she been loved, she could not but have felt an utter incapacity to reciprocate such love, a lethargy was upon her soul; like a captive bound in fetters of adamant, she felt a weariness of spirit to which death would have indeed been a relief. She had no child, either, happily, we will say, for this, in her case, would have been a doubtful blessing. When reciprocal affection is wanting between the parents, it is even more than doubtful whether to see around you the miniature form of one indifferent, if not hateful to you, is likely to alleviate the bitterness of your lot, while the conviction that now, for the sake of *his* children, you must bear without flinching your daily, hourly burden, till you lay it down in the friendly repose of the grave, will scarcely contribute to your happiness.

We are aware that the general notion is, that the maternal instinct is so strong in women as to cover a multitude of sins and sorrows. We know, too, that such *ought* to be the case; but is it so?—Let the numerous cases of infanticide which blot the pages of the English journals, let the child desertions, the foundling hospitals of France, and the statistics of children who die out at nurse in that country; let the sale of infants in New York to parents wanting heirs, answer this question. We decline to draw the painful conclusion.

But to return. Poor Muriel now sat day after day alone, mourning a neglect far harder to be borne than hate, jealousy, or even the cruel tongues born of such passions. It must be remembered, too, that our heroine had just sufficient fortune to render it unnecessary that she should work (and only those who have in grief been forced to labour know the solace it has proved), and also just enough of what are termed riches to isolate her from the sympathy people feel for physical privation, yet far too little to give her the position she craved; thus, with youth, beauty, genius, which (had she been born under a happier planet) might have placed her in a sphere congenial to her refined nature, to be neglected, cast

aside, as it were, like a noxious weed—truly, her lot was a hard one!

Often would she ask herself, at times of deepest despair, was it not better far to have loved and lost, than never to have known happiness?—and her heart, like that of every other true woman, would reply, "Ah, yes, a thousand times yes! give me storm and tempest—anything, rather than life's dull stagnation, for she who has never felt the glow of affection, she alone

> "'Has so sad a lot below,
> That her unutterable woe
> Only the pitying God can know.'"

And the storm for which she prayed was already brewing, the threatening clouds were even now darkening over her devoted head, she little knew how soon to burst.

Costesca had been away some months, having gone, Muriel believed, to Ireland. No letters having for some time been received from him, she imagined it possible her husband might shortly return home; indeed, she almost began to desire his coming, anything to break the monotony of this daily routine of weary, weary life. "After all," she reasoned,

"he *is* my husband, and, as such, it is my duty to try to love him, to yield him more than a cold obedience. I have hitherto thought only of his faults; I have done wrong; henceforth be it mine to discover his good points; it is, perhaps, after all, greatly my own fault that he is so much away. Well do I remember that time when he nursed me so tenderly through a long illness, and tedious, fretful convalescence. Courage, my heart! by God's help I will in future endeavour to become a better wife than I have hitherto been. In *future*, indeed! ah, who may count one moment longer than the present?"

As these healthful thoughts passed through her mind, Muriel felt more hopeful than she had done for many a long month, and taking her drawing materials, she arranged them on a table near the window, in order to catch as much as possible of the dingy light of that dull December day. She had been about ten minutes thus employed, when the postman's sudden and hasty knock brought her heart into her mouth. Another moment, and the servant of all work entered, holding a letter in her begrimed and filthy fingers.

"Please, ma'am, be this for you?"

Muriel seized—almost snatched it from the girl; it had the Paris post-mark, and was written in the fine Italian hand of her husband, but its purport we shall learn in another chapter.

CHAPTER XLIII.

PREMONITIONS.

THE cards of invitation to the ball at Lisle House, Park Lane, were duly printed and addressed, but were never destined to be sent out, though a numerous attendance of the *élite* of the *beau monde*, together with an unusually large sprinkling of royalty of our own land, and of the foreign scions of princely rank, now visiting the shores of Great Britain, was expected. The following elaborate passage in the columns of our friend the *Post*, will explain doubtless to the satisfaction of every body the reason why this long-expected, much-talked-of ball, was destined not to come off during the present season :—

"The ball to be given at Lisle House, Park Lane, by the Lady Mildred de Lisle, to Her Majesty, has been unavoidably postponed, in consequence of the delicate, though not alarming state of health of the youthful mistress of the mansion, who has been

ordered by her physicians immediate change of air, and perfect repose. Her Ladyship proceeds, we understand, on Monday next to Lisle Court, the seat of Sir Bouverie de Lisle, M.P., who will join the family circle immediately after the prorogation of Parliament."

Such a disappointment had burst like a bomb-shell in the midst of the world of fashion—such a disappointment was enough to provoke a saint. In vain now those dresses—ordered express from Paris—by many an aristocratic belle—in vain the Marchioness of —— had had the family diamonds reset—in vain little round Lady Walsingham had planned to show herself the satisfied wife of husband No. 4 in this circle of the *élite*, into which she had managed to edge her way by dint of patient waiting and incessant pushing, without however having the slightest possible right to enter its precincts, either by birth, education, or even by marriage—husbands two and three having been rather more near of kin than is exactly allowed by church laws of consanguinity. Still, this lady had succeeded, as we have said, in worming her way into the charmed circles of fashion, and having done so, she defied all "Parklania and his wife" to turn her out.

"Absurd!" observed the little woman to her latest lord; "couldn't the Duchess of Glengarrow preside? the ball would have lost nothing in brilliancy."

"I don't know," demurred her courageous mate; "Lady Mildred is so young, so beautiful, so perfectly the high-bred lady, that I for one fancy the ball, in the absence of such a hostess, would have proved a failure."

"Hem!" grumbled the little fat wife of fifty; "Lady Mildred is certainly pretty, but too slight and youthful to be called a *handsome* woman."

Whereupon the happy husband, some fifteen years or so younger than his rich lady wife, merely turned upon his heel smiling, and whistling a tune, went straightway down to the House.

To our old acquaintance, Lady Hazlitt, however, the postponement of the ball in question was a perfect god-send; this poor lady lived on the very verge of the *beau monde*, eyeing it from its outer limits like the Peri at the gates of Paradise, suffering, as she looked and longed, the very pangs of Tantalus. By the way, why is it that the good people of our sober plodding country, are so often dissatisfied to have as acquaintances those in their own rank of life, and are ever anxious to entertain and be entertained by

those who are on the step of the ladder just above them? Professionals and merchants delight in M.P.s and baronets, these, in their turn, love to be the guests of a cabinet minister, or an earl. The smaller potentates themselves would move in the very exclusive circle to which in all countries it is the privilege of the very few to belong, as a right. In short, there is a perpetual upward pressure in London society which, we regret to say, looks as if we were a nation of toadies, who could not feel at ease unless basking in the smile of the great. How much happier should we be, too, if we could prevail upon ourselves not to care about knowing people more fashionable than ourselves—how much more quiet, too, and pleasant would be our homes if we preferred a few valuable friends, though untitled, to myriads of acquaintances, even though a coronet were painted on the panels of their equipage!

Now poor Lady Hazlitt, unlike Lady Walsingham, had never suffered anything but rebuffs in her weary struggle, perpetually frustrated, to enter the golden portals of what is called *par excellence* society; the dream of her small mind since the worthy alderman, now defunct, had been knighted, was, if possible, to know great folks, or if not to know them, at least to

make believe she had them on her visiting list. Now, therefore, was a famous opportunity, not to be lost, of giving herself a lift in the world; so she ordered the gaudy yellow chariot, with its pair of jobbed horses, and set out with the intention of making early calls on all her female acquaintance, and so managing as to make the theme of conversation always turn upon the postponement of this ball, to which she had never been invited, not being, as may be imagined, on the visiting list of Lisle House.

"My dear Mrs. Smith," she would say, "you *can't think* how annoyed I am; poor Jenny, and Gussy too, have been crying their eyes out; I tell them they will quite ruin their complexions. Dear Lady Mildred asked us *verbally* a month since—*so* kind and considerate, she said she knew we always got our ball-dresses at Madam C——'s, the Court milliner, and as Madam had large orders, we should do wisely in ordering our dresses at once; and they came home last night—a pea-green satin for me, with heart's-ease and amethyst ornaments, and for the girls, dresses of rose-coloured tulle and pearls. I declare I could cry myself almost."

And then the portly, rubicund dame would leave, and roll away in her chariot to recount the same

string of falsehoods to another gaping acquaintance, in whose estimation Lady Hazlitt would instantly rise immensely, *on account of her intimacy with the de Lisles.* So wags the world, alternately gammoning and toadying one another, till discovery lifts the veil, and then the nails and fangs of the envious, the mean, and vile, will clutch and tear with the delight of the hyæna each dear friend's character to rags.

Well was it for the noble house of de Lisle that its lovely young mistress had been compelled to retire for a season from the scenes of gaiety and the fatigue of incessant vigils, which were already undermining a constitution never of the most robust. Well for the fond hopes which the Baroness held in her proud heart as dearer than her own life, and which might, but for these timely precautions, have been frustrated; for six months had scarcely sped, when the Lady Mildred de Lisle presented her delighted husband with an heir, and half an hour later the young mother added a female scion to that noble house, who, in right of her own, might come to inherit the title and estates of de Lisle, and was therefore to be welcomed as heiress presumptive, even in the presence of a twin brother.

Great were the rejoicings that Christmas to fête

the birth of the young heir and his sister. Like a prince royal was he held up in his nurse's arms to the view of an admiring crowd, who loved their lord almost with a devotion worthy the feudal ages; nor was the little daughter who followed so quickly on the heels of her elder, omitted in the general joy, all remarking, or fancying they remarked, in the more delicate features and slender limbs of the tiny baby girl the promise of wondrous loveliness, while the young heir already appeared to their fond eyes crowned with all the manly, the glorious beauty of the proud and happy father, and of the still youthful and queenly grandmother.

The christening—which did not take place for three months—was most grand and imposing, the Bishop of the diocese, assisted by his two chaplains and the rector of the parish, officiating. The ceremony took place in the private chapel of the baronial residence, whose panellings of dark-coloured oak only made the wreaths and garlands of white and red camelias, with which the chapel was decorated, look fresher and gayer from contrast; the subdued light from the large painted window over the altar fell upon the two children like a ray from the gates of Paradise.

The young heir was borne on a cushion of purple velvet and gold, his sister lay like an image of wax, on a pillow of white satin, with silver fringe and tassels. A long string of aristocratic sponsors stood around ready to answer for any prospective transgressions the infant pair might possibly commit. Her Majesty, and the Crown Princess of Prussia, who had signified their gracious intention of standing, were there represented by appropriate proxies. The children were named severally, Albert Gerald Bouverie, and Victoria Imogen Mildred, the second name being of ancient date in the family, and also being at present that of the Baroness de Lisle, their grandmother. Great and long were the rejoicings at this auspicious event, so great, indeed, that none marked the pallid cheek and attenuated form of the young three months mother, who was borne on a couch to the ceremony, and lay draped in white satin and ermine; a sweet pale lily, looking for all the world like an exquisite work of art—so still she lay, so white, so fair.

Lady Mildred complained of no pain, but since her confinement she had suffered much from weakness, being unable, without great fatigue, either to

walk, or even to sit up for long together. She ate so little too, that a bird might have taken as much, and scarcely have been satisfied; but this was not noticed, as the lady had ever eaten and drunk in a somewhat ethereal style, and her weakness was considered the natural effect of her having thus lately presented the de Lisles with two *such* children —as never before were born upon this planet—so fine, so strong, so perfect were these wondrous babies. It was, however, scarcely possible not to notice the transparent, almost sylph-like beauty of the delicate creature, into whose soft blue eyes had dawned an expression, never before perceived in their limpid depths. It seemed, indeed, (that like *Undine*, to whom marriage with one she loved had given a soul), so the young mother, as she lay watching with all the intensity of maternal love, the innocent helpless beings to whom she had given life, she too had at last found out that she possessed an immortal soul, and to her had this been revealed through the joys and hopes of maternity. There are some women in whom the conjugal love predominates over the love of offspring—others there are, who love their children with a passion they have not to give their

husband. Lady Mildred appertained to the latter class.

The spring came, and Sir Bouverie, who had since the meeting of Parliament, gone constantly to and fro from London to Lisle Court and *vice versâ*, now began to talk of moving his family to town for the season, but Lady Mildred gently, but firmly declined her husband's proposal, alleging as a reason that "the country air was much better for the children."

"We can leave them, my dear Mildred, surely," replied Sir Bouverie.

"You have not heard all my reasons, Bouverie; neither for the babies nor for myself, would London air be advisable this season."

Sir Bouverie looked at his wife, whose cheek at that moment, though thin, wore a bright and roseate bloom. He smiled—

"If compliments in a husband were permitted, I should say, my love, that you are looking remarkably well—indeed handsomer than ever. You know how interested is our party in the questions to be mooted this session; and which will, I fear, keep me a very close prisoner at the House. If, therefore, you decide on remain-

ing here, we shall, I fear, meet but seldom, for I shall rarely have time to run down to Lisle Court."

"Come as often as you can, dear Bouverie, at least," replied his wife with a slight sigh. "I really could not undertake this year the fatigues of a London season."

"It shall be as you please, Mildred," he replied, kissing the transparent hand which lay listlessly beside her; "but I wish you would rouse yourself to a little more exertion. I think you would feel all the better for it."

Lady Mildred only replied by a smile more sad than joyous.

"Promise me, Bouverie, you will come home long before the flowers fade, and stay here till—till.—Ah! forgive me," she said melting into tears, "I know not why I weep."

"You are nervous, my love, this constant staying in the house is bad for any one; let me drive you out in your pony carriage—you will not refuse me on the eve of my departure."

Nor did she refuse him; but she came in so utterly prostrate, after her drive, that she had to be carried to her bed; keeping her room for some days

after, nor did she again venture on a longer drive than one hour at a time, and that in the britzska, propped up with cushions, and, though it was summer, enveloped in shawls and cloaks.

CHAPTER XLIV.

UNMASKED.

MURIEL'S fingers trembled so, that she could scarcely open the tightly sticking envelope, without at the same time tearing the delicate foreign paper. The letter appeared long, and an indefinable feeling of terror crept over her, as she opened it, making her almost dread to decipher its contents. However, even those gloomy missives, with their tell-tale border of deepest black, must at last be perused, and therefore our heroine, as we all should do, summoned courage and read as follows :—

"MY DEAR GISELLA,—

"You have doubtless long been expecting to hear from me, but my pressing professional engagements have left me but little time for correspondence. Now, however, it is absolutely necessary that I should write to you, in order that you

may understand what are the terms on which we are to stand towards each other for the future.

"I have long observed with pain, *chère amie*, that such of your affections as once were mine have long since been alienated from me; and having thus perceived, and likewise well considered our position, I have come to the conclusion that an amicable separation would contribute to our mutual happiness. You, my dear Gisella, have your own independent fortune, which I have ever refused to touch, and which is sufficient for yourself. I have a profession which is my pride, and which makes me, I may say, rich. But in order to render such separation *irrevocable*, I must make you a confidence, never before breathed by me to mortal being, though some of my early friends and *compatriots* are aware of it. *Ma chère amie, you are not, and have never been my wife*—for this reason:—When a mere boy I married a widow some years older than myself, a very handsome woman, and quite a *dame du grande monde*. The marriage, though perfectly legal, was a private one, the lady being desirous of concealing such a *mésalliance* from her family and her children. She never bore my name, nor did we even reside under the same roof. A year later my wife got tired of

me, and took as her *cavalière servente* a Venetian nobleman, whom she followed to Venice. Jealous and furious, I pursued, vowing vengeance on my lady wife and her paramour, but her threat of giving me up to the Austrian authorities as a spy of Mazzini's soon brought me to my senses, and I was only too glad to accept the annuity settled upon me by the Countess, to be paid semi-annually, for such time as I should keep our mutual secret.

"Now you must be aware, *Gisella mia*, that our religion—the Roman Catholic—by making marriage a sacrament, has rendered divorce an impossibility; this, in cases such as mine, appears most unfair, and thus it turned out, that Costesca having made the acquaintance of a charming and virtuous young lady, with artistic gifts of no mean order, and having been so unlucky as to fall in love with her, thought it no very great crime to induce her to bear his name and share his destiny. On coming to London, however, with my second bride, as a crooked fate would have it, I met the only two persons who are aware of my first marriage, having acted as witnesses at the ceremony, and who had lately seen my wife at Venice in the full flush of health, wealth, and wanton enjoyment. How, then, I ask you, could I

in this land of prudery and propriety, live openly with one not my wife?—how introduce you as Madame Costesca, when discovery would have ruined my reputation? What lady would have sought my lessons for her daughters?—what *salon* would have continued open to me? No, Gisella *mia*, you cannot but see that to acknowledge you publicly as my wife was utterly out of the question. Nevertheless, we might have continued our connection had it not seemed distasteful to *you*, without letting the world into our secrets: there is a great charm to me in such mystery, but you, probably, would have failed to discover it. Now, however, as neither of us are one whit the happier when together, but rather the reverse, you cannot blame me if I confess to feeling more at ease in the society of ladies a little less cold, and somewhat more loving than yourself. I have no remorse as regards our short *liaison*. I found you without friends, and I gave you my protection. None know or shall ever hear of this from my lips; and if you will be guided by one still your friend, you will return to your uncle once more as Miss Brandon. I do not flatter myself you will regret me; on the contrary, I doubt not we shall both feel relief when the chain which bound us is snapped.

Take, then, my eternal farewell. Be happy, and forget as soon as possible W. C."

At six o'clock the maid of all work who had brought in upon a tray Muriel's simple dinner, found her sitting with the open letter on the table before her, apparently pondering over its contents. Nearly three hours later the servant, happily stupid as most of her class, entering again, observed the lodger seated precisely in the same position; she then brought in the usual cup of sloppy tea, and removed the untouched dinner, to which she did ample justice in the kitchen.

After the tea had been served, it was rarely that Muriel was disturbed till the next day; but even the stupid maid ran screaming to her mistress when, the morrow, on entering to light the fire, she still found the lodger, stiff, cold, and white, seated opposite the fatal letter on the chair near the window.

"Oh! deary me, deary me; and sure the lady's dead, and this is her ghost."

The screeches of the frightened girl, however, aroused Muriel from the stupor of grief into which she was plunged, and when the cross-grained, prying

landlady entered, she had sense enough to account for her having experienced so sudden a shock by the innocent falsehood that her husband, who was lying dangerously ill in Paris, had summoned her to his side immediately. The excuse came into her mind like a sudden inspiration, and then the woman, whether moved by pity as believing the story, or in the fear of altogether losing a lodger who paid so regularly, overwhelmed Muriel with attentions. After having prepared a tempting breakfast of hot tea, muffins, and broiled ham, she insisted on her partaking of some of these delicacies.

"Lors me, mum, you can't travel on a hempty stomick; now doee pray take a mouthful o' summat, 'pend upon it the seenor will be better when you gets there."

So our heroine, for the sake of peace, swallowed a cup of tea and forced a mouthful or two down her throat, while the woman, aided by the servant girl, commenced packing Muriel's small wardrobe, a task which its owner soon rose to assist.

"And may-be ye'll both be back to eat your Christmas dinners here, mum; and if ye'll give us a line we'll have all nice and comfortable like."

Muriel assented mechanically, and the packing up was soon finished and the cab at the door.

"Where to?" asked the driver.

The traveller had not the remotest idea; the wide world was before her to choose; she had not made her choice yet, she must answer something.

"To the railway station."

"Which one, my lady?"

"Lor poor dear, her troubles have made her daft —to the Dover, aint it mum?" said the shrill scream of Mrs. Shoeblack from the door steps.

"If you please," rejoined the soft voice from the cab, and then its inmate sank back, and felt that the curse laid on Cain, that of being "a stranger and a wanderer upon earth," was hers also. But that Father in Heaven, to whom Muriel had "committed her ways," had not in her dire extremity forgotten her. He had but hidden His face for a time, and in these moments of her utmost need, He was an ever present help; for our Heavenly Father, when He appears to short-sighted mortals to be the farthest, is sometimes close—"yea, even at the doors."

The cab rattled slowly away with its load of boxes, but the old and feeble horse, taxed beyond his

strength, soon fell never again to rise, and Muriel, opening the door, was assisted to alight by the arm of the Rev. Mr. Harrison, her ever remembered, ever regretted pastor.

CHAPTER XLV.

IN MEMORIAM.

DEEP and dread was the gloom which overshadowed England's fair land, as with a pall on this memorable Christmas, whose skies were eclipsed by that great loss—sudden, unexpected, and therefore the more terrible. On the 14th December, 1861, the nation was, as it were, awoke by the tolling of the great bells, whose brazen tongues are silent except in times of great public calamity, and the people were paralysed by the intelligence which followed fast, that he, the nearest and dearest to the throne, but a few days since in the full flush of health, in the very blush of manhood's prime, handsome, gifted, good—had been cut down as a flower, that there in those ancient and time-honoured halls, already as it were decked for the festal family gatherings of the season, was to be heard nought but the sound of weeping, and mourning, and woe.

All were anxious to learn how that Royal Lady, now, alas! a widow had borne the fearful shock, which had shivered all her happiness, all longed for the details of that cruel night which left her alone in her desolation; and many a weeping eye shed tender rain over the page which told how—in grief too deep almost for tears—the heart-broken wife had sat all that dreary night through, *his* hand in *hers*—how that if she moved but for one moment from his side his eyes seemed to watch her, beseeching her quick return—how that the touch of that gentle woman's palm appeared as it were to ease the noble sufferer's pain, and inspire him with resignation to support the trial in that supreme moment when all earthly titles and honours are as nought. All marked tearfully how that sweet Princess Alice, who idolised her father, was borne fainting from the chamber of death, being unable any longer to support the sight of the last parting between parents she loved so dearly. All prayed in deep sincerity of heart that their Queen's trial should not prove greater than she could bear; and God heard the petitions of a loving people, and the consoling news soon was bruited abroad how that the highest lady in the land, in that dread hour of bereavement, not forgetting even then that

she was royal, and a Queen, had called her children around her, telling them she would not allow her grief, however bitter, to interfere with her duties to her people, which, by God's help, she would perform to the uttermost—a resolve in which she implored her children to strengthen her.

And nobly has that thrice Royal Lady kept her promise to her people, made almost in the presence of the mighty dead. True, the brow is still bound with the badge of widowhood, and flowing robes of deepest dole have replaced the purple and ermine; yet the Queen, though bidding farewell, perhaps for ever, to the pomps, the vanities, the frivolities of the world, is not the less the tender, nursing mother of her people, second only in her maternal heart to her own—whom she bore to the husband of her youth; for never does a real case of suffering come before the Queen's observation, without the ready hand being stretched forth in relief, the kindly word spoken in sympathy; never is a great national undertaking commenced, or carried out, without commanding Her Majesty's prompt and interested attention—never does there occur any public misfortune, through carelessness or otherwise, but it ever meets, either with gentle and wise censure, or sweet womanly pity from the Royal

Lady whose affliction has but rendered her still more worthy the esteem, the adoration of her people.

Surely if aught might add to that bliss which we are taught awaits the pure and holy in the great beyond, the heart of Albert the Good must pulsate and thrill with a deeper joy, even in the realms of the blest, as he beholds the path marked out and courageously pursued, through good and through evil report, by her who has never ceased to mourn his too early withdrawal from this mortal sphere. And well may that sad widow mourn a loss to all so great—to her irreparable; bitterly in the isolation of her high estate must she miss a companionship so congenial, a care so tender and watchful, grievously lament the loss of the wise counsels, the manly mind, the keen and polished intellect, the tact which knew so well how to fill a position, which, to a man of ordinary ability, narrow heart, and shallow vanity, would have proved one of utter peril, where he might have made shipwreck of his own happiness, and of hers who was the life of his life.

The late Prince Consort was indeed a man of whom it is difficult to speak without incurring the censure of hyperbole, for in him was united every gift of person, of character, of position. Framed in the

very prodigality of nature, standing in many respects by himself, because of him we may say we cannot expect to see two in our generation: yet, withal, there was such geniality in his great and loving nature, that we cannot but sympathise with him as a man, and long to see the perfection of his character mirrored, however feebly, in our own. Truly to use the words of England's greatest poet and philosopher:

> "A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman,
> Framed in the prodigality of nature,
> The spacious earth cannot afford again."

Many were the lines composed on that mournful occasion in memory of a Prince so revered; many the expressions of sympathy, in verse, and in prose, with the deep grief of the Queen. We trust then we may be pardoned for transcribing some original stanzas, which, if they have little intrinsic merit, are at least the production of one who wrote, bedewing the page as she did so with "true heart tears."

In Memoriam.

"I view the peerless lady of our Isles,
England's young Queen, in maiden modesty
Before the altar of our holy church,
A royal bride; her hand is link'd in his,

The husband of her choice—the princely youth
Of scarce some twenty summers—'May God shield them,
That regal pair; Heaven send them length of days,
Best health, a happy hearth, and fairest children!'
Such was a people's prayer, for much they love
Their virgin Queen, the blushing rose of England—
'Twas a bright vision, but it passed away
Like all earth's pageants.
Years of untold bliss
Victoria and Albert shared together,
In holiest bonds of most true wedded love.
Comely sons, and graceful daughters, blest
Their palace home, and England lov'd her Queen
More as the virtuous wife, and tender mother,
Than as her Lady Liege. Thus twenty years,
Twenty long years have faded as a dream,
The youthful sons and daughters of the Queen
Have grown in strength and wisdom; but the father,
That loving husband, that most gifted Prince,
Yet in the prime of age, and manliness,
And beauty—where alas! is he? * *
* * * * * * * * Anon I stand
In a dim veiled temple. I behold
The chivalry of England grouped around
A tomb! The sacred words are faintly spoke
And scarcely heard, for sobs and sighs which burst
From manly breasts, in pity for their Queen.
Ah! gently lay those flow'rets on his bier,
Gifts of affection from a widowed heart
Which mourneth, and 'will not be comforted.'
Weep! Royal Lady weep! the precious balm
Of tears, shall soothe thy lone bereaved soul:

Mourn! Royal Lady, mourn! for Jesus said—
'Blest he that mourns, he shall be comforted;'
Thou weepest not alone, for all our sighs
Go with thee in thy sorrow. E'en this tribute,
Most humble tho' it be, it yet is stained
With true heart tears. And there is One above
The husband of the widow, and the Father
Of thy young orphans, who will comfort thee!
He too—that hero Prince—too pure for earth,
Tho' absent, yet is present. His deep love
Surrounds thee still. Thy guardian angel here:
Oh! deem not, lady, his bright spirit can e'er
Forsake thee. From the summer's spheres of bliss
He comes, to shield thee and to comfort thee—
To give thee strength to bear thee royally,
To tell thee—those whom God hath joined together,
Shall never thro' eternity be parted."

The solemn retrospect presented by these memories precludes us from continuing in this chapter the tale which now draws nigh to its conclusion. We will therefore remind our readers who have found the foregoing stanzas worthy of perusal, that the lines beginning—

"Oh, gently lay those flow'rets on his bier,"

refer to a most touching circumstance which occurred at the funeral of the Prince Consort. During the ceremony, and just at the moment the coffin was

about to be lowered in the vault, three wreaths were brought into the chapel, which had been made by the hands of the Queen herself and the Princesses at Osborne, and had been forwarded by express, so as to arrive fresh and dewy, to perform their office of love. These garlands then were reverently placed on the bier in the name of the bereaved widow and daughters of the deceased Prince, and the earthly remains of the beloved husband and father were consigned to their place of rest.

CHAPTER XLVI.

NO LONGER AN ORPHAN.

MURIEL TO SIR BOUVERIE DE LISLE.

"You will, in the midst of your joy and prosperity, I feel sure, pardon, if for the first and last time I thus address you. I could not, indeed, read of the birth of your children without writing to tell you how deeply do I rejoice in your rejoicings, how fondly and fervently I invoke on those dear ones, and on you, every blessing that Heaven can bestow! Yet, it is not only for this that I now intrude on your happiness. Alas! I have a duty to perform also towards myself, and I trust that, surrounded as you are by ties the nearest and dearest, you will ponder over this letter, and that your good heart will do me justice.

"Gerald, in our last interview, in words too painful even to recall to mind, you cruelly accused and upbraided me, making against me insinuations, the

recollection of which, even now, brings the burning blush of shame to my cheek. These accusations were utterly and entirely without foundation; and I tell you solemnly, now and for ever, as in the presence of my God, that I was then innocent and pure, as when we sat together beneath the elm tree, looking on the ever flowing stream, on the banks of that river, still dearer far to me than any other may ever be. Alas! that pride and indignation should have thus kept me silent, when words would, perhaps, have convinced you—just, generous-hearted as you are—how cruelly you had wronged poor Muriel! And that silence—how dearly it has cost me! how dearly, too, will it cost you, when you know all —all—that fearful story!

"To obey your command, then, Gerald, I married that man, without ever having ever felt for him one sentiment, save that of gratitude—gratitude, because he watched me through the dangerous illness which succeeded your departure, and was kind when all others had forsaken the invalid actress, leaving her to die in a foreign land.

"To make a painful story short, then. To obey you I wedded that man, in the full hope and intention of performing towards my husband all wifely

duty to the best of my power. Ah! my friend, let no young girl indulge so vain a hope—esteem and friendship *may* ripen into affection—but where there is no sympathy, loathing must—as in my case—take the place of any milder feeling. Day by day did I discover in him, whom I had vowed at the altar to love and honour beyond all others, traits of character —of a meanness all but incredible—physical cowardice, only equalled by a moral timidity, which to the boldness of vice united the more than slavish fear of being found out by the world, who was the 'god of his idolatry.' Oh, the weariness of such an union! Yet was I spared much annoyance by the absence of the man—an absence that became at last well nigh desertion—till one morning came the crowning infamy of all. In a letter, the villain chose to make known to me that the young and trusting maiden had been deceived; that she *was not, and never had been, his wife;* that another had alone the right to bear his name—in fact, he showed me that I was henceforth but an outcast from society, and in very truth, *the name* you would have named, had not your lips been powerless, even in your contempt and anger—thus to insult me. Stunned, paralysed by the blow, I left that lodging, poisoned by the

trail of his serpent presence! and went forth—I knew and cared not whither—a stranger and a wanderer upon earth, knowing no resting-place for the sole of my weary foot.

"Yet, dear Gerald, though forgotten by man, God had not forsaken the unworthy one who in her mortal agony had called on His name. A good man—a minister—whom once before I had met under circumstances of great trial, was providentially sent to cross my path. This noble saint took the desolate, houseless wanderer home, where his gentle partner surrounded her with every womanly care, every affectionate attention—never questioning, never insinuating even, that they would desire any information from their guest, they wearied not in their kindly offices of Christian sympathy. But she, whose virgin veil and wreath had never been replaced by the crown of the matron; she, the wife, and yet no wife—could she continue with these pure children of God, and not confess to them all? Dear friend, she could not thus deceive them; and, therefore, one evening, when the light was waning, so that that chaste matron might not mark the glow of burning shame which stained her brow,—the good man also being from home—did Muriel, with tears

and bitter sighs, recount her sad life, and, prostrate on her knees, entreat her friend first to pardon, and then to banish for ever the sinful one from her pure presence, that she might hide her head, bowed down with so great a weight of shame, in some lonely spot, far from the haunts of men. But before I had done speaking had that tender woman drawn me to her heart, bidding me have courage; for that when the will consented not, sin had no power to sully the soul. 'Had not even our dear Lord,' she said, 'passed through many and grievous temptations—being thus in His human nature "made perfect through sufferings," till in the end the human was merged in the splendour of the ever-present and in-dwelling Godhead?'

"Many more words, kind and wise, did that sweet consoler speak, 'tempering thus the wind to the shorn lamb,' till her dear husband returned. Then, mother-like, taking me by the hand, she presented me to him, merely observing, that they had at last found a daughter. Since this evening, thrice blessed, I have even dared to hope that I may once more claim the friendship and esteem of my dearest brother. On earth we may never again meet, for to-morrow our little party leave for a retired hamlet

on the coast, where, amid the loveliness of nature, we trust, not to *forget* the world, but rather to labour for its good, and thus to attain to that peace which is alone to be found by those whose love to God and knowledge of His laws ultimate in uses to mankind; that, at least, is the bright example set by our beloved pastor and his gentle wife, and in that path the faltering steps of the erring Muriel would fain follow.

"And now, once more farewell, dear, dearest Gerald, you will never know my whereabouts, nor hear again my name, for it is by that of my adopted parents alone that I shall in future be known. Farewell, then, still dearly loved in all purity, though parted here by the will of Him who in all things ruleth wisely, we may yet meet again in that land where there is no more sorrow nor weeping, nor any partings; there, where each meets other face to face, you may perchance judge me with a truer judgment. This sweet dream shall hallow my sleeping and waking thoughts, till the vision shall be merged in bright reality.

"Again and again, Farewell."

CHAPTER XLVII.

FADING WITH THE FLOWERS.

"PROMISE me, Bouverie, that you will return home again never to leave us before the flowers fade," such had been the young wife's prayer to her husband as he bid her a hasty farewell on the morning on which he took his final departure to London for the season.

"Often and often again before that, my love, if you will only promise on *your* part to grow quite strong and robust before the autumn," had been the smiling reply, as the parting kiss was given, and the speaker, in all the flush of youth, and health, and prosperity left the apartment with a firm and rapid tread, and vaulting into the saddle, proceeded at a quick pace, followed by the groom, to the railway station, to catch the morning express, his valet having preceded him with the luggage. Lady Mildred watched the manly figure, and listened for the

well-known tramp of the horse, which told her that he was really gone, then softly sighing, she sank back again exhausted on her sofa, closing her eyes in all the languor and weariness of incipient disease. It was not that she suffered any pain, yet day by day her strength seemed to fail her more and more—she faded by imperceptible degrees, like the flowers in whose short-lived splendour she seemed to read her fate. Each morning her favourite attendant was charged to replenish the exquisite vases of Dresden and Sevrès manufacture which decorated the boudoir and dressing-room of her young mistress with the choicest plants, and it really did appear as if the lovely invalid gathered fresh life from inhaling their sweet aromas, for other sustenance, save a teaspoonful of the most fragrant honey, together with a delicate biscuit of the finest flour, with occasionally a ripe peach or nectarine, or a few luscious grapes from the hothouse, were ever allowed to approach the lips of her whom the domestics had named, in their admiring devotion, the Lily Lady. Thus calmly and peacefully, a flower amid flowers, that young life ebbed away; her health, always delicate, had been gradually and surely undermined by the late hours and feverish dissipation of London

fashionable life, till the seeds of that insidious malady, which, like the worm in the rose-bud, ever attacks the youngest and loveliest, had been sown. Then did the transparent cheek wear a brighter tinge, the eyes, of clearest azure, become still more lustrous. In these fatal signs, and even in the rich luxuriance of the glorious hair, which, when unbound, shrouded the now fragile figure, as it were, in a haze of light, a watchful affection might have seen cause for alarm, and have surrounded the sweet invalid with a tender care and a fostering attention, which might then have arrested the progress of disease ere too late. But no, the husband, absorbed in the aims and hopes of public life, was rarely at home; and when there, the Baroness, wrapped up, as we know, in her son's political career, usually formed one of the domestic circle, where the conversation ever turned on subjects of mutual interest to Sir Bouverie and his mother. Nor was the talk unfrequently of the progress made by the infant heir in strength and beauty, and all endowments. To this the young mother would herself be a delighted listener, for father and grandmother alike idolized her noble boy, though she would prettily pout and take graceful offence that her little Imo-

gen's charms and engaging ways should be put in the shade, even for her adored brother. Sometimes the Baroness would ask her son his opinion of the invalid.

"My dear Bouverie," she would say, "I wish you would induce our sweet girl to exert herself a little. I can scarcely ever persuade her to leave the house."

Thus appealed to, Bouverie would look towards his wife—

"Dear Mildred, you will never gain strength, believe me, if you are so little in the air; you ought to drive out, now the weather is so fine:" or he would, perhaps, propose taking her to the sea-side, or plan some pleasant autumnal tour.

But in reply to all these proposals Lady Mildred would only sigh or shake her head, declaring that she needed no change, and was better and happier at home than she could be anywhere else.

Thus placidly passed week after week, the husband's time taken up by the busy world, whose ambitions and pleasures are so rarely troubled by the thought of the grim spectre—Death; the wife drooping as a flower amid her flowers, each day becoming more spiritualised, as the films of clay were gradually removed from her eyes, each day becoming

more gentle, and loving, and patient, as she neared the eternal shores.

It so happened that Bouverie was detained once in town for four consecutive weeks, and when at last he did return, it was to find his young and beautiful wife so fearfully changed that he was actually appalled, horror-stricken at the sight; those cheeks, once so pure in their rounded outline, were now sunken and hollow; the beautifully full lips were tightly drawn over the pearl-like teeth; the eyes, alas! too dazzling, were framed in circles dark and livid, the form, once rounded as the Medicæan statue herself, was faded and shrunk, the mere shadow of itself.

Good God! what had his mother been about to allow that young creature thus to die by inches? he reproached her in his heart—bitterly, too, accusing his own selfishness. Alas! he knew not how rapid is the march of that fatal malady when nearing the goal; but, not to alarm *her*, he restrained the mad impulse he felt to rush into those poor, slender arms stretched out to receive him; for *her* precious sake, though a prey to the most violent emotion, he would command his feelings.

Tenderly and softly, then, he approached her,

"My love! why, oh! why did you—did not my mother write? my heart is broken to see you thus!" and he encircled the frail form with the manly arm, now, alas! powerless to protect her; and as the still graceful head dropped on his shoulder, tears of bitterest agony fell like rain upon the wealth of golden hair, which shone around the dying girl as a glory. Yes, that one beauty was at least left her, and, with pardonable coquetry, she had bade her maid leave her soft tresses unbound on the morning of that day on which, after his prolonged absence, she expected her husband.

"And my mother," he said, somewhat sternly, "why has she kept me in ignorance of your state?"

"Your mother, dear Bouverie, and myself, have not met for a fortnight; she was upset in her carriage, and has, unhappily sprained her ancle and her right wrist; when last here she did not appear to notice much change in me."

This sentence, too long for her gasping breath, was finished with difficulty by the poor invalid, a paroxysm of coughing having come on, most painful to witness. Bouverie paced up and down the room, a prey to that anguish of soul we feel when powerless to alleviate the sufferings of those we love.

"I shall telegraph instantly for Petersham, and for Sir Philip Hampton, and though I trust in God we shall soon have my darling restored to perfect health, still, if it would be any comfort to her, we will telegraph for the Duchess of Glengarrow and Guinever."

But Mildred seemed to desire nothing for the moment but the society of her husband, and never tired of making him repeat that now he would *never, never* leave her till she herself was so strong that she bade him do so.

Three of the most celebrated physicians came down from London, summoned by the now anxious husband, but all shook their heads, declared they had been called in *too late*. Nothing could now save the patient—

"Not Italy," suggested Bouverie, almost despairingly.

"Not even change to a southern climate; nothing now can be of the slightest avail."

The Baroness stood silent, with rigid, marble face, at the bed-side of the dying girl-wife, a picture of remorseful grief. She felt that a profound gulf had divided herself and her son, and though no word of reproach had passed his lips, bitterly did the mother

bewail her neglect of the child who had been committed to her charge. With agony unspeakable did the conviction at last dawn upon her, that the life of this innocent being had been made a sacrifice to the demon of pride and ambition. Alas! how was she to answer to Mildred's mother, when she should be summoned to the death-bed of her child? how frame any excuse to her who had confided to her friend such a treasure?

And that mother came at last, and the noble father, and the sweet sister of her youth, but all felt how powerless were they to stay the departing spirit, which already was pluming her wings for a flight to a brighter and a better world. Kind and loving to all, it was evident that Mildred was most at ease when her husband sat with the little hand in his, now so attenuated as to appear actually transparent, and to him it appeared that he had never, till now, felt the real value of her he called his own—whether it was the idea that he so soon should lose her, or that the soul she had at last found, now gleamed from every lineament, spiritualizing, etherealizing her beauty, as it never had done in happier hours, who may tell?—the human heart abounds in contradictions, and we are an enigma difficult to decipher.

At length the physicians had declared that the pulses of life were flitting fleetly away, and but a few days, perhaps even hours, might bring the final separation. But none would tell the gentle sufferer, all feared the shock might hasten the dreaded moment; till at last her husband resolved to undertake the painful duty.

Seating himself by the bed, and tenderly kissing her, he whispered, "My love, I would speak to you on a painful subject, may I do so?"

She sat propped up by pillows, on her luxurious bed, a vase of choice exotics beside her, she pointed to them, "I shall fade with those, Bouverie; the first frost will nip their sweet lives, and poor Mildred will then wither with them."

Bouverie had leaned his head on the waxen hand he held, and his tears were falling fast upon it. She watched him in silence.

"Do you know, Bouverie, except for our babies, I am almost glad I am going to die?"

"Glad, my own love?"

"Yes, Bouverie, because since my illness, I have begun to feel that you love me."

"And have I not always loved you, my own?"

"No, dearest, you have not; but it was my own

fault—frivolous, vain, and silly, how could you love me? but you forgive me now." She had taken his hand between both of her tiny ones.

"Forgive *you*, Mildred, you will kill me;" and then all the smothered passion of his soul burst forth, and he wept, as a man—and a strong man only can weep—sobs tearing his bosom—his heart contracted by a very spasm of agonised grief; but he made a violent effort to gain an outward appearance of calm.

"Oh! God, Mildred, can you pardon my cruel, cruel neglect; the selfish ambition which has kept me from your side? Can *you* pardon the husband who never loved his wife, as she deserved, till about to lose her for ever?"

"We were young," she said, "and had it pleased God to spare my life, I think I should, perhaps, have become more worthy of you, and now, darling, I wish to say to you, that if later, when months, years, have passed, you find her who may suit you better than your lost Mildred, then take her, and be happy with her; but, oh! Bouverie, beseech her, for your sake, and for mine, to be a loving mother to my precious babes—our noble Gerald, our pretty Imogene."

She had excited herself too much for her failing strength, and she now fell back exhausted into the encircling arm which cradled her as a sleeping infant. Bouverie tenderly wiped the drops from the fair brow, damp with the dews of death, and pouring a little cordial into a spoon, forced her to swallow it. Half-an-hour elapsed ere the gentle patient had revived sufficiently to speak once more. She then said, slowly, and with difficulty—

"Dearest Bouverie, I wish to tell you that I know, and have long known, that my hours are numbered." He bent his ear nearer to her lips, that he might not lose her lightest word, for her voice each moment waxed more and more feeble.

"Ever since I first was taken ill, now some months ago, I have observed by my side a veiled figure, and she, as gradually she unwinds the drapery from her form, has given me to understand, that when she unveils her face my hour is come."

"Do not frighten yourself, my love, with superstitious terrors, trust in God."

"I do not fear, darling Bouverie, her presence strengthens me, for she is good and gentle; she says, when my spirit leaves the form, her veil will

wrap me round and save me the pain of beholding your tears."

"Oh! my darling, my own, these are but the fancies of a sick bed."

"No, Bouverie, *they are realities, your* world is now the world of shadows to me—for, see, all but her face is unveiled." Then smiling sweetly, as if she had seen a bright vision, the dying girl-wife said, stretching forth her hands, "Take me—take me! I am ready! husband, farewell, bless you—my darlings all—all."

Thus passed from this earthly sphere the pure spirit of one who, ever through the course of a short and blameless life, had acted up to the light, however feeble, vouchsafed to her.

Let us drop the curtain over the anguish of the widowed husband—the bereaved family. Gerald had scarcely addressed his mother since that fearful hour, when first he had marked the fatal change in his young wife; but on the morning which succeeded that day of gloom, in which all that is mortal of youth, and love, and beauty had been consigned to the cold dark tomb; he silently placed a letter just received in the hands of the Baroness. It was that written by Muriel to her early playmate. The

Baroness, on perusing it, burst into a passion of tears, the first she had shed since death had made their home desolate.

"Alas! alas!" she exclaimed, wringing her hands, "what misery have I not wrought! One murdered, the other ruined. My God, forgive me, and free my guilty soul from these hateful, hateful fetters of pride—pride which has blighted the happiness of my dear ones, as with a curse."

END OF PART THIRD.

PART IV.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE LITTLE CHURCH AMID THE MOUNTAINS.

About fourteen years after the date of our first chapter, and some five or six later than our last, a gentleman dressed in a travelling suit of shepherds'-plaid stood talking with the landlord of one of those pretty small, homelike inns, which so greatly add to the comfort of the tourist in Wales:—

"You go down that green lane, sir, there to your left—then, crossing those corn fields, take the first turning to the right, till you come to a grassy slope and a clump of trees—take the footpath up the mountain then, sir, till you see down in a hollow the spire of a little church—that is it, sir."

The stranger thanked the speaker, and was pro-

ceeding towards the path indicated, when mine host called after him :—

"Service begins punctually at a quarter-past six —you'll like it sir, I'll warrant, a deal better than the parish church, let alone the organ and singing, which is the best as has ever afore been heard in these parts."

The stranger, courteously lifting his hat in token of thanks, sauntered leisurely out of the trelliced porch, and into the green and shady lane, as if determined on enjoying the delicious summer evening, or rather afternoon, for it was now about a quarter-past five. It was the Sabbath too—not such an one as some time since we have described in the great metropolis of smoke, but a quiet, holy Sunday, in which all nature seemed to partake, wearing an air of peaceful calm, which told of rest from labour, of repose after weariness. The breath of the soft south wind sighs, as it were, in very languor; the birds even appear to keep holy day, having ceased from their carols; and the happy villagers stand in groups before each cottage porch, or take their cheerful evening meal, ere they go up to the house of God to worship.

The traveller pauses again and again, seeming

fully to appreciate the charm of the hour and the scene. Apparently a man of some thirty or more summers—tall, erect, of noble bearing, he looked one formed to do battle with the world for the right, and to come forth from the struggle victorious. Never had the sun beam glanced o'er a brow more broad and clear—surely no mean thought might harbour there, nor craft and worldly cunning disturb the crystal depths of those large limpid orbs—'twas a countenance which must have grown finer with years, despite the few lines of silver which already mingle with the dark curls, and the marks of care, which render the complexion less smooth and youthful, for there is now more of soul in that face, more depth, more intensity of feeling; yet the rigid lines about the firm lips and finely-moulded chin, the thin nostril, and noble carriage of the head, betoken a nature of adamant, and tell of a pride lofty and indomitable.

And well might that traveller pause to gaze on the ever varied scene of enchantment which met his view, from the quiet calm of the green lane, all but hidden between high hedges, where the wild rose and eglantine grow together in tangled luxuriance, out into those golden fields stretching far and wide, waving

almost imperceptibly in the soft air, stretching down to the banks, sedgy and willow-fringed, of the glittering river. In the distance the blue hills and bluer sky, and farther on, through mountain clefts, just a glimmer of the sparkling ocean, like a sapphire set in brilliants—and all this beauty with a temperature just warm enough to drown soul and sense in a pleasing languor, steeping them in the aroma of flowers, the perfume of new-mown hay, the myriad scents and sounds which ever refresh the wanderer alive to the blessings the Creator has, with no niggard hand, showered around us.

Sir Bouverie de Lisle—whom our readers will have recognized in the distinguished stranger—guided by the silver sound of the bell, had now reached the little church described by the landlord, a pretty building, plain and simple, with latticed windows and a deep porch, covered with a bower of jessamine, honey-suckle, and clematis. A few of the congregation were already assembled—some were waiting outside, and some had entered the cool church, and taken their places in one or other of the open seats facing the pulpit, or reading desk, whichever it was, for there was but one place apparently allotted for the use of the clergyman. The people

dropped in by twos and threes till the church was full—even crowded. Then commenced a prelude on the organ, low, sweet, devotional, a delicious melody, simply but exquisitely harmonized, lifting the soul from earth, preparing it to join in the solemn act of worship to follow. The stranger appeared deeply to feel the heavenlike music, and when the minister, kneeling, prayed with all the eloquence of a soul in communion with the Highest, he held his breath, that he might not lose a word.

"How many *read* prayers, *say* prayers," he thought; "how few *pray!* this is surely the *beau ideal* of prayer, the very gate of Heaven!"

And what is indeed true prayer but desire? and desire on the part of man has it not the effect of opening his spiritual nature to the influx of the Divine Spirit? The external asking, when not a mere form, is but like baptismal water, "the outward expression of an inward grace." "Draw nigh unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you:" not by a change in the eternal, immutable nature of the SUPREME, but by a change in *ourselves* as it were, by which we enter into sympathy with His will, which is, that all His children should realize that their highest happiness consists in seeking Him, and earnestly desiring the

blessings that flow from Him, blessings never bestowed unless we place ourselves in that receptive posture of the mind we call prayer, for thus only "The Lord gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

The divine philosophy of prayer is a wide subject, too wide to be more than glanced at in these pages, for as Tennyson beautifully says:—

> "More things are wrought by prayer
> Than the world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
> Rise like a fountain for me night and day;
> For so the whole round earth is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

The prayer at an end—softly, serenely, stole the sweet music of the hymn on the ear:—

> Abide with me! fast falls the eventide,
> The darkness deepens, Lord with me abide!
> When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless! O abide with me!

The slow, sweet, sacred strain rose and fell, floating through the church in measured cadence, checking each thought light and trifling, waking the soul to holy aspirations. The blue heaven without, the evening breeze now rising—seen and felt through the open windows—appeared to take part in the worship of that small quiet flock, mingling with

their devotion glad thoughts of summer flowers; and the sound of the trickling streamlet near by blending with the hymn, seemed as though its murmurs would likewise ascend to heaven, borne on its waves of harmony.

Gerald felt a peace steal over his soul, to which he had before been a stranger; so that in the after years of happiness in store for him, he never forgot the hour spent in that calm quiet church, standing amid the silent mountains, for in that hour did the first heartfelt prayer he had ever addressed, borne on the wings of ever-present angels, ascend upwards to the throne of grace:—

"Lord, do with me what Thou wilt, whether for good or evil; only make me to know Thee—show me Thy truth."

The preacher's discourse was upon a subject interesting to all, understood by few—the spiritual marriage, or indissoluble union of souls fore-ordained from all eternity. There had evidently been a bridal of late amongst his flock, for the pastor gave this as his reason for choosing such a theme.

After alluding at first to the primal marriage in the garden of Eden, as ordained by God Himself, and then to the Lord's having sanctioned by his presence,

and even chosen as the scene of his first miracle, the nuptials in Cana of Galilee, thus hallowing for ever the state of matrimony, he proceeded to show how rarely was a true union found to be the lot of mortals.

"How gross," said he, "on this subject are the conceptions of men and women! how little does the world know of such a love! and yet there has ever been an instinct, more or less faint, of the right idea, namely, that 'marriages are made in heaven.' This is a remnant of a most sacred truth, which has survived the fall. But, sad, sad, is the common practice: marriage is entered on for mere outward considerations—for beauty, caprice, passion, mis-called love—for rank, wealth, station, a home, with scarce any reference to interior fitness and qualifications. Then comes that punishment which ever follows the transgression of an eternal law. Then it is perceived how little the State, and the Church considered *externally*, have to do with the reality of marriage, that, in fact, this coupling together is the greatest outrage on the divine principles, and can never constitute a true marriage. Nor is there ought which so wears upon the very soul itself, if at all sensitive, as the compelled experience of a legal tie which death

alone can annul, with one for whom the spirit (whence alone emanates true love) can feel no sympathy. Nor is the heart ever so lonely as when mocked by the semblance of an unreal union. My friends! I have no words to express the horror I feel for the frivolity with which this subject is treated in the community. Society indeed is rotting to the core, by the abominable evils which have profaned this holy of holies. But, beloved, I will not longer harrow your feelings by pursuing further this painful subject. I would rather rejoice your hearts who yestermorn were witnesses, in this little church, to what I trust was an union—not in the words of the Church of England, *till death do them part*, but to ALL ETERNITY. Let us then now picture—feebly doubtless, but we trust truly—the real bridal, symbolized by the great Swedish Sage*, in the Marriage of Love and Wisdom in the Mind of the Eternal. On earth, then, the true conjugal state is the fountain of all delight, because it is the fundamental love, whence arise all others; and if the joys attendant upon mere natural affections be so great, what must it be when marriage is exalted to the spiritual? when, under the influence of the Divine

* Swedenborg.

Source of all love, it has become admissive of heavenly blessedness, as far above all natural enjoyments as the heavens transcend the earth? Now, if marriage be an union of souls, must not that union be perfect and eternal? Can it be that it can be snapped for ever, at the very point too when, after a long life of intertwining and regenerate affections, husbands and wives are ripened for a still more perfect union? No, ever-beloved friends, God himself is not more indissolubly united in His Divine Love and Wisdom than are male and female souls, destined to a similar union. Yes, there, in that high world, the two souls who have been formed for each other *must* flow together, when the false ties formed in time shall have no power over them. Sin and impurity may postpone these holy nuptials, but it is the blessed purpose of God, founded in His own eternal nature, to unite all pure souls in such heavenly marriage. My beloved children, let me then, in conclusion, beseech you not to enter on this holy estate—you who know the cost—lightly, but rather to seek from Him, the fountain of all delights, a legitimate and lovely connexion. Ah! the true Love wedded to Divine Wisdom can alone make life happy. See how it fills the heavens and the earth with beauty

and wonders! the very air seems redolent with its perfume, while fruits and flowers ripen in its glowing sun; the blessed birds, too, make music from its joys; yea, the whole creation teems with it. Let us, then, swell the divine harmony of the universe, believing that:—

"'For evermore,
When Love doth come with angel innocence,
We have the sanction of the still small voice,
And feel the primal blessing.'"

CHAPTER XLIX.

COUNTERPARTS.

THE sermon, of which we have endeavoured to give an epitome, ended, the concluding hymn sung, the congregation began to disperse, each toward their separate home, with serious yet happy faces, exchanging as they met or parted, kindly greetings, friendly salutations as would the members of one family.—A band of brothers, in truth, they seemed to him who stood there a stranger and a pilgrim in their midst, listening entranced as the organ pealed forth joyously the soul-thrilling wedding march of Mendelssohn, in a manner which would have done credit to the organist even to one of our finest cathedrals, but heard in a small secluded church in Wales, was positively electrifying. Moved by a feeling of curiosity he could not master, the listener at length turning to a gentleman near, a benevolent-faced man, pale and thoughtful, with long white hair and beard, said—

"Pardon me sir, you appear to be one who is likely to know; will you, then, inform me who is your organist?"

The gentleman smiled.

"The daughter of our good minister, sir, plays the organ; she possesses quite a genius for music: and all her talents, which are varied, she devotes to the glory of God and the good of her fellows; in fact, she is an angel, ere yet the mantle of mortality has fallen from her shoulders."

The stranger felt much interest—more, perhaps, than he had felt for years, in the fair organist whose very fingers seemed full of soul as they dwelt on the ivory touches of the instrument, perhaps because a vague hope had entered his breast—could it be that he had been led to this wild sequestered spot to find at last her whom for four long years he had so vainly sought? Could it be that but the length of a few feet alone now divided him from the bride of his soul? Intently—anxiously—with almost a painful tension of the nerves, he watched each movement in the organ loft of that form which flitted here and there, collecting the music, the hymn books, closing tenderly the much-loved instrument. He watched so intently, that it was as in a haze that he saw at

last the crimson curtains undrawn, and a face, at that distance still young and fair as hers which had made "the starlight of his boyhood," loom, as it were, from a mist. For one moment only she stood revealed, yet was that instant enough to show to him, now clenching the back of the pew against which he leaned for support, that the loved of his childhood, the idol of his youth, the long lost, ever loved Muriel stood before him, appearing, as she gleamed on his sight like a vision, beautiful as when they had last parted. Spell-bound he stood, he knew not how long, till roused from his reverie by a light touch upon his arm. The woman who had charge of shutting up the church stood there keys in hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I am sorry to interrupt your prayers, but by your leave—I am obliged to go home—and I dare not leave the doors open."

He walked out, still like one in a dream, scarce knowing the path-way he followed, till mounting ever higher, he arrived at the summit of a cliff commanding an extended view of hill and dale, upland and emerald dell, of the distant ocean on one side, and old Snowdon on the other, his hoary head crowned with snow, now bathed in roseate and ever-changing hues, as the slowly descending sun flung

over him his mantle of gold and crimson. Our tourist, a true lover of nature, awaking from his trance, adores in his heart the Giver of all these good gifts, thinking aloud in his solitude on the eternal hills, "Were but my Muriel here!—*my* Muriel!"

"Who calls me?" said a low, sweet voice from the other side of the jutting cliff, as a female form at the same time made itself visible, starting into sight suddenly from a rustic seat cut in the cleft of the rock, concealed from view by some thick bushes growing a little lower down on the opposite side of the mountain path.

"Who calls?—my father?"

Gerald turned quickly, and ere she had time to observe, much less to recognise him, caught her to his breast. Uttering a faint scream, Muriel would have disengaged herself, but Gerald still held her in his strong embrace.

"Muriel, have you forgotten me?"

"Gerald—brother," she said faintly, still struggling for release.

"No, not brother now, but lover, husband—*for evermore bride of my soul!*"

"Ah, Gerald, remember you are not free thus to

address me," and she drew herself away from him almost in terror.

He, too, no longer held her; a shade came over the fine face, a gloom gathered in the dark blue eye.

"Muriel, God has called my Mildred to worship with the angels around His throne, and on her bed of death she bade me seek her whom I could love, and who would love me, and beseech her"—and now the tears welled up into the sad, earnest eyes—"beseech her to be a mother to our bereaved darlings. Muriel, do you refuse to be that mother, that consoler?"

Her cheek had varied from the pallor of marble to the crimson of the damask rose. She turned away, and was for some few moments silent, endeavouring, perhaps, to command her voice. Her companion, meanwhile, fed his eyes on that ever-familiar face, still soft and young—on the classic profile, the downcast, drooping lashes. She turned at last towards him, and he then observed the deeper, more intense expression of the whole countenance, in which alone was to be seen any trace of the touch of Time's finger.

"Gerald," she said, "you have so surprised, nay, startled me, that I can scarce collect my scattered

senses to reply. Your sweet children—for them—for their sakes—I would——"

"And for mine," said her lover; and winding his arm about the graceful waist, and drawing her gently towards him, he murmured—"Muriel, my own! my bride! for *my* sake!"

There was no more feigned reluctance now; the fair head had found its resting-place, at last, on the manly shoulder which supported its soft pressure: the woman's heart reposed sweetly on that of her bridegroom—her *counterpart*, and the rosy lips confirmed the choice of that heart—murmuring gently, musically, as the ripple of the brook—

"Yes, dearest! ever beloved! thine, thine only, FOR ETERNITY!"

CHAPTER L.

CONCLUSION.

EXTRACT FROM A LOCAL PAPER—WALES.

"YESTERDAY the little primitive church embosomed amid our beautiful mountains was the scene of a most highly interesting ceremony, no less than that of the marriage of Muriel, only daughter of its revered pastor, the Rev. William Harrison, with Sir Gerald Bouverie de Lisle, Bart., of Lisle Court, Warwickshire, M.P. for the county. The fair bride, robed with the greatest simplicity, in white glacé silk, was attended by twelve bridesmaids, attired in white muslin. We are able to state, on good authority, that such is the unassuming piety and retiring modesty of this excellent young lady, that it was only at the earnest request—we may add, command—of the noble mother of the bridegroom, the Baroness de Lisle, that the bride was induced reluctantly to add to the almost quakerlike plainness of her attire the cus-

tomary ornaments of wreath and veil, worn by maidens of gentle birth when about to plight their troth at the altar; her only other adornment being one string of large pearls, the gift of her betrothed, worn around her throat. The church, gaily dressed with garlands of white roses and evergreens, was densely crowded, though it was remarked that the nuptial group, considering the rank and fortune of Sir Bouverie, was very limited, consisting only of his noble mother, and the twin children of the Baronet by a former marriage—led into church by their grandmother in either hand. The ceremony was most impressive—the reverend father of the bride officiating; and we noticed, when the nuptial vow was pronounced by either party, that the words FOR ETERNITY were substituted for those of the usual service, *till death us do part.* The Baroness de Lisle seemed more affected even than the bridal pair during the sacred rite; for, immediately after the blessing had been pronounced by the good minister in a voice tremulous from emotion, that noble lady, giving way to a paroxysm of uncontrollable feeling, clasped her newly-made daughter in her arms, embracing her again and again with the most undoubted affection. No union could possibly have taken place

under happier auspices, and we, for our parts, sincerely desire to unite with those dear to them in wishing for a young couple so well suited, a bliss founded in mutual love, that shall be never ending, eternal !"

THE END.

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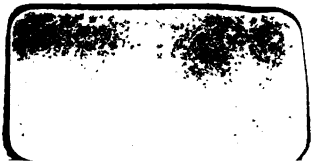
BY THE AUTHOR OF "NO EASY TASK."